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Manipura Chakra

Rishi Nityabodhananda



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Manipura Chakra



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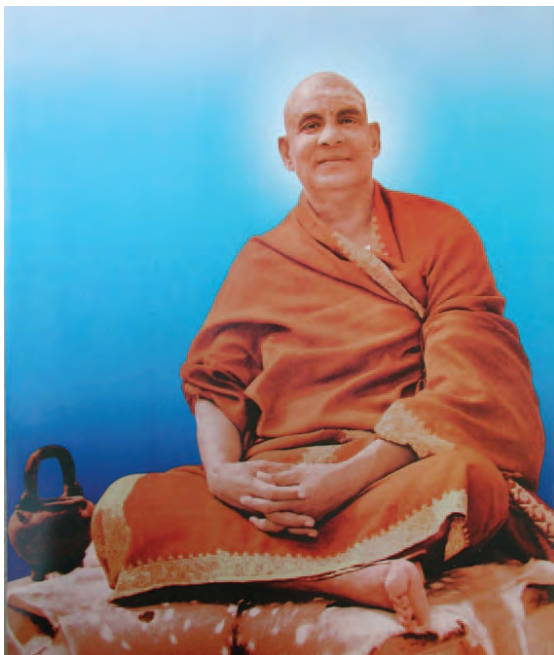
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

Contents

Introduction	1
1. In the Jewelled City	5
2. Locating Manipura	13
3. Centre of Prana	18
4. Nectar of Immortality	22
5. Energizing Pranamaya Kosha	26
6. The Petals of Manipura	30
7. Vrittis of Manipura	34
8. Symbology of the Fiery Lotus	50
9. Deities of the Lotus	54
10. Awakening Manipura	63
11. A Unique Experience	107
Bibliography	110

Introduction

The meaning of manipura is based on two Sanskrit words: *mani*, meaning jewel and *pura*, meaning city, just as ‘pur’ is used in the names of Indian cities such as Nagpur, Puri, Bilaspur, and so on. Therefore, *manipura* can be translated to mean ‘a city of jewels’. The experience of manipura is the experience of a dazzling array of sparkling jewels, as thousands of nadis come to manipura, many more than in the other chakras. This is the reason for the dazzling array of lights. According to the *Gautamiya Tantra*, it is ‘lustrous like a gem’.

In 1970, there were just fifteen or so swamis living in the old ashram of Bihar School of Yoga in Munger, India, and Sri Swami Satyananda lived with us. He would queue up in the food lines and wait for his meal, he would clean alongside us while we washed up after lunch, he scrubbed all the toilets while we cleared the gardens and paths, and he would enthrall us with spiritual tales during mealtimes. He was one of us. We were all aspirants struggling for a spiritual life and he included himself in that identity.

We always knew he was special because of his insights, his unflagging energy, his ability to bring cheer to anyone who needed it, and his amazing ability to attract people who just loved him. One day he said to everyone over a cup of morning dahlia, sweet porridge, “There’s no difference between you and me. I’ve just got more willpower, that’s all.”

This left me with some questions. What is willpower? Where is it? How can it be developed? What can be done with it?

Manipura is the centre of will. We don't have to know anything about manipura in order to develop willpower, however, we do have to know something about trying to achieve. We all know it from those situations where we are trying for something but it is not happening, and we fail over and over again until the day comes when we decide, "I will do it! Nothing is going to stop me." Then the decision to persist predominates, and we try and try and try until we get it done, one way or the other. This applies to personal efforts such as sadhana, it applies to social effort such as getting your way, and it applies in karma yoga to achieve for others.

A couple of years later I was in another ashram, the Dhanbad School of Yoga, and was teaching the coalminers of the region when Sri Swamiji called me to meet him in Calcutta (now Kolkata). He had arrived from the Munger ashram with about ten swamis who were all en route to Bombay (now Mumbai), to preside over a yoga convention in Thane. I met him in the morning and he told me, "This evening, we're going to Bombay for a yoga convention and you're coming. Go and get a ticket on the Bombay Mail."

I had some money, so I went to get a ticket on the Bombay Mail. In those days the Bombay Mail was the most prestigious train in India. Normally, one needed to book four or five months in advance to get a reservation on it and there were no unreserved seats. One couldn't just get on the train. First, I tried all the normal places where one would get tickets and they said "No, fully booked." Then I went to the foreigners' ticket office. I had a passport and said, "Look, I'm a foreigner! Please give me a ticket." They said, "No. You've been in India for years. You are not in the category of foreigner." Then I went to the commission agents, you know, the places where for a few extra rupees they manage to get a ticket from behind the counter, and still no success. Then I tried bribing, but no luck. With my guru's command on my mind, and the thought, 'I am going with him on the Bombay

Mail train that night', I tried every possible way of getting a ticket and some impossible ways as well.

By the afternoon, I was worn out and had exhausted every possibility. I simply could not get the ticket. I went to Sri Swamiji who was in another place in Calcutta and I said, "Swamiji, I can't come; I can't get a reservation." He looked at me and said, "Nityabodh, you don't know the meaning of willpower." He said, "Okay, we're going to the station soon. Have a bath, have some food, and we'll go." Then we all went to the station and he instructed, "When you get into Howrah station, to the left there is an office called the TTC office. Go in there and say, 'I have to go to Bombay; I have to go to Bombay for darshan of a mahatma'." He told me, "You just say that."

The rest of the group went ahead to board the train and I went to the Travelling Ticket Collector's office. It's a small office, built for four or five people behind the counter, and it was packed. I was stuck in the back; I could not even see the counter. Suddenly, as if I was Moses leading the Jews across the Red Sea, all the people parted and left a path for me straight up to the counter and an invisible force pushed me there. Before I knew it, I was breasting the counter. One of the TTC officers looked up and said, "Yes?" I said, "I have to go to Bombay for the darshan of a mahatma." He looked over his shoulder and said, "Get an officer from that Bombay Mail." Along came the requested TTC officer. The man behind the counter said to him, "You put this man on the Mail." He said, "Don't worry, you're on it." I got a seat reservation; not a sleeper. I got a seat! It's a long journey, two nights, and I had a seat there. Then I ran up to Sri Swamiji; he was right up at the front of the train in the best class, he looked at me and said, "You're on the train?" I said, "Yes, Swamiji, I'm on the train." He said, "Go and occupy your seat."

I was on the train, an impossible achievement. How did he do it? He had just visualized it and said, "It will happen." He had the ability to visualize and manifest it. We can all

visualize. We can all visualize a hundred million dollars. Can we manifest it? We can all visualize a big yoga school. Can we manifest it? This is willpower. He demonstrated this ability again and again. In so many situations, his willpower prevailed. Sri Swamiji left his guru's ashram with two cloths, a mission to fulfil and willpower to turn an idea into a reality.

Sri Swamiji's accomplishments are a perfect example of the greatness that can be achieved through a developed manipura. Sri Swamiji started out with a briefcase embossed with the initials IYFM, 'International Yoga Fellowship Movement' and an instruction from his guru. He had no royal patronage, no government grant; he had only his own sankalpa and the support of his devotees in all of his endeavours. From Sri Swamiji's powerful will emerged four incredible achievements towards sharing the gift of yoga with the world: the International Yoga Fellowship, the Bihar School of Yoga, the Yoga Research Foundation and the Sivananda Math. The IYFM has the aim of creating a global fraternity of yoga through yoga training centres, dissemination of knowledge of yoga through publications, research, and the introduction of yoga into schools. The Bihar School of Yoga is the platform for imparting yogic training to all nationalities, householders and sannyasins alike, and to provide a focal point for the global revival of the ancient science of yoga. The Yoga Research Foundation aims to provide an accurate assessment of yogic practices within a scientific framework and to establish yoga as an essential science for human development. Finally, there is Sivananda Math, a philanthropic organization which aims to uplift the neglected, underprivileged sections of society by following the precepts of his guru, Swami Sivananda: serve, love, give. All this and more came from one mind, one decision, one vision and willpower. We are going to explore this idea through manipura.

1

In the Jewelled City

Manipura is known by different names in the tantras, Upanishads and Puranas. These names were drawn from typical tantras that include: *Todala Tantra*, *Gautamiya Tantra*, *Mridani Tantra*, *Rudra Yamala* and *Sat Chakra Nirupanam*. The names are descriptive according to the experiences of those who had them. Some examples are:

- *Manipura*, meaning jewelled city
- *Manipuraka*, meaning a mystical circle on the navel
- *Dashapatra*, *Dashadala Padma*, *Dashapatrambhuj*, *Dashachhada*, meaning a ten-petalled lotus
- *Nabhipadma* and *Nabhipankaja*, meaning navel lotus.

The different names given in the various tantras, Upanishads and Puranas are recorded by countless masters from all parts of India. Their common language has been Sanskrit and their common aspiration has been to attain the highest possible spiritual consciousness through kundalini practices. There is no standard for the kundalini nomenclature. For example, a South Indian yogi may have described his experience and named the chakras in his way and a Bengali yogi, having had the same kundalini experience of manipura, will give it a name which will be descriptive according to his experience. That's why we have a variety of names. The most popular and commonly accepted name of the chakra, however, is manipura.

Beginning of spiritual life

Swami Sivananda has written, “If one’s mind becomes purified, the mind rises to the manipura chakra, or the centre located at the navel, and he experiences some power and some joy.” He says, ‘some power and some joy’. His description of manipura chakra is not expansive, it is limited. Swami Sivananda was a master; he knew that there is more power in store with the awakening of higher chakras, so he qualifies manipura with ‘some power and some joy’. The joy we can have in awakening manipura is the joy of being able to decide and do; not decide and think about it, but decide and do. One decides, “Today I will start an anushthana and every day I will continue, two hours morning and two hours evening.” The aspirant sits down and unfalteringly, just proceeds to do it. At the end of three months, the aspirant says, “Ah, I have completed my decision, my anushthana” and he can give himself a tick. This is a joy; it is the joy of personal power. It is a kind of pleasure, being able to achieve what you set out to do.

The crossing of swadhisthana is a psychological event, dealing with your own personal philosophy and your own karmas. We have to know that fulfilling desires will never satisfy the demands of *ahamkara*, the ego. It is only in manipura that the first glimpse of personal power and personal will comes, along with the freedom from bondage to desire. In ordinary life there are two pursuits: one is the pursuit of happiness through enjoying just where we are, enjoying our own presence, our own breath, our own thoughts and our own being. The other pursuit is for achievement. These two pursuits are in varying proportions amongst individuals. The happiness of having fun is always tinged with the urge to achieve. In our early years it manifests in our attitude toward school work and studies, but even after graduation, after establishing a career and a marriage, there is still an urge to achieve. There is an infinite variety of quests all fired up by the urge to achieve. The ability to bring the urge to fruition is an expression of willpower; and achievement in this brings an automatic balance of our emotions and a state of ‘some joy’.

Working with manipura is the beginning of developing spiritual values. The powers of manipura are separate from the earthly realm. We can start to behave like human beings, like mental beings. We're not just tied to habit, we're not just tied to the ordinary stuff consisting of what we have to do, and we're not slaves to our own creations; we have risen above this and we are free to be able to decide and do other things at a higher level, through willpower. The ability to imagine and manifest at will is a joy and the power comes from within. Manipura is the crossroads from where personal power and spiritual potential begin to unfold.

When manipura becomes the base for kundalini, it represents the beginning of our spiritual journey beyond mental turmoil. Buddhists traditionally call manipura 'the home of kundalini'; they don't consider the lower chakras for this purpose. Buddhist texts say that until kundalini sits in manipura, there is no spiritual insight. Therefore, manipura is the beginning of the spiritual expansion. In swadhisthana we dealt with mental turmoil and problems. They are the confusions that we live in; the emotional problems and the trauma and the innumerable loads of karmas and samskaras that life seems to challenge us with. Due to our choices we have created these karmas and samskaras ourselves, and while kundalini rests in the lower chakras, it seems as though many of our sufferings are caused by life itself and not by us! It is only with kundalini being seated in manipura that clarity dawns.

Power of will

The world contains many people who are highly educated, and some very highly educated. Through their academic achievements, these people manage high positions in educational realms and within institutions, yet when they go out into the field of life they simply can't manage. Companies are in the hands of very clever business administrators. First, they qualify for and graduate from prestigious schools such as Harvard Business School, and then they begin managing

the big companies while trying to follow everything by formula. Everything is done according to the formulas that they have learnt in school. Where is the will in this approach, where is the creativity?

At a grassroots level, yoga teachers simply strive to make yoga programs happen; they don't need to be a business school graduate to do that. They just have to make it happen. To launch a yogic event is not easy. They cannot just advertise with flyers, make some announcements on a social networking site like Facebook and wait for things to happen as though some machine will do the work for them. It doesn't work like that. To make a project a success, you have to make it happen. You really have to put your will behind it, and when it happens in this manner, you get a very pleasing result. When a new project is started, some fire is ignited inside and energy pours into every aspect of the new project, and the more energy you put into a project, the more successful it will become.

Once I was putting together one of these yogic events, which is really not easy as usually the capital is limited and one can't employ people who are lacking in willpower, something I have known for a very long time. So when the 'Create an Event' feature came into existence on Facebook, I thought, 'Wonderful, I can create this event simply by sending a message to the whole world that my kirtan or satsang program is on.' Even though I knew that necessary personal willpower had not been injected, I still pursued the lazy path of event creation, because in my head, *tamas*, the quality of inertia or laziness, always has a say. The result was predictable; I brought about the opposite of achievement. It was a flop and there is not much joy in that. You really have to put your will behind event creation and then it happens, and you get a very pleasing result. When the fire of will burns, the mind wakes up and becomes sharp, the details needing attention become obvious: talking to people, inviting people, spreading enthusiasm and interest, and the result is the creation of a wave of success.

If you have the inclination you can write brilliant things, you can come up with wonderful passages; poetry pours out of you with the power of will. It wakes everything else up in the whole brain. It's a wonderful thing.

Storehouse of prana

Manipura is the storehouse of *prana*, the essence of life or the vital energy force. On one hand, every bit of this vital prana is the same: the prana in the air; the prana that turns the fan, the prana that runs the computer; it is all prana. It's the same stuff, and it is comparable to the electricity running all these machines. On the other hand, the prana which functions in the physical body is known by five different names: *prana*, which moves between the navel and the base of the neck; between the navel and mooladhara it is called *apana*; the prana for the digestive system is called *samana*; in the arms and legs is called *udana*, it goes around and around and circulates in the arms and legs. The fifth prana is called *vyana* and runs throughout the whole body, giving us additional energy for times when we want to start moving quickly, for example.

As manipura awakens, prana begins to flow in increasing abundance. Around manipura chakra, which is situated behind the navel in the spinal column, there are a vast number of nadis that supply prana; however, many are blocked. A *nadi* is a river or channel of energy through which prana or psychic energy flows. Just as water from a river flows through a pipe endlessly until it is limited by a blockage of mud or rust, in the same way, prana is limited by the blockages of the vrittis on the manipura petals.

In Chapter 6, which deals with the vrittis on the petals, the reason for this increased flow of prana with the awakening of manipura will become obvious. *Vrittis* are those mental patterns or modifications which are often circular in nature; one leading to the next, and so on. Amongst the vrittis blocking the flow of prana in manipura are jealousy, sadness, spiritual ignorance, treachery, shame, delusion, and more. Is it any wonder that while these psychologically limiting

personality traits continue to exist within us, the amount of energy available for other things would be minimized? It is astonishing that we can even cope with our ordinary, humdrum existence when shackled by such limiting vrittis.

Prana is endless. There's no end to it. The sun is a source of prana and though it has a limited supply, it still has far more than what we need. The same power that lifts the huge aeroplane off the tarmac, with three hundred people and all their luggage, is the same power and the same prana that keeps our hearts beating.

Manipura is the distribution centre of prana for the entire body. The pranic network begins from a place called the *kanda*, the location where *sushumna nadi*, the main nadi situated in the spinal cord, connects with mooladhara. Some texts say that it is twelve inches or thirty centimetres above it. The pranic network starts from the kanda, and the main distribution centre of prana comes out from manipura and supplies the whole body. Therefore, when we become aware of the flow of prana in the chakras, we can notice that there are many more nadis coming out from manipura than there are from any other chakra. It is the biggest junction of nadis of all seven chakras.

Somebody once asked me what happens to the prana after it is used. It left me scratching my head. Is it wasted? Is there such a thing as 'used' prana or 'second-hand' electricity? There is a show on television featuring a snobby lady who always calls the power supply company and says, "I have a very posh house and very nice furniture and I want to make sure that the electricity you sell me is pure and that it has not been used by anyone else." The show is a ridiculous comedy on foolish snob values. In the same way, we needn't bother our minds with trying to get pure prana that has not been passed down from anyone else. Prana is prana, and it can be used for any energetic purpose. Life depends on this source.

Qualities of an awakened manipura

Patala siddhi: Patala siddhi is one of the psychic powers developed by awakening manipura chakra. One who awakens

manipura awakens patala siddhi. *Patala* is the underworld. *Siddhis* are psychic abilities or supernatural accomplishments.

Some years ago, the state of Bihar, India, in which my guru's ashram is located, used to be run by thugs. Not far from the ashram was a village of criminals. That area was a gun manufacturing area. There was, and still is, an official gun factory next to the ashram and many unofficial gun factories here and there. Ingenious locals have even made guns out of bamboo. These local people were very fierce.

In times past, people never drove at night in this state. They would be held up at gunpoint and the thugs would take everything, including the clothing. Everything! There were a lot of criminals who survived on looting and pilfering with impunity. No police would dare go into a village to arrest anybody. One day, a well-meaning police chief said, "We're going to round up all these criminals and we'll put them in jail." A police raid was conducted, and the next morning I heard that fifty police were found dead, floating in the Ganga. After that incident, authorities decided to stay in their offices and leave those criminals alone.

Sometime later, two men came to the ashram from one of those notorious trouble spots. One of them was reputed to have killed eighteen people, and the other was his good friend. They became very good disciples of Sri Swamiji. Once, there was a problem during the construction of Ganga Darshan Ashram in Munger. A mischievous local lawyer was camped there and he wouldn't move. These two new disciples said, "Swamiji, we'll get rid of him, don't worry." Swamiji said chuckling, "No, no. We'll stick to legal means through the courts." Despite their criminal histories, after some time they became close disciples and surrendered their weapons. After that, many more gun-owners came and surrendered their weapons to Sri Swamiji. Sri Swamiji was, in effect, lord of the underworld. He definitely had patala siddhi.

Freedom from disease: Another quality of an awakened manipura is freedom from disease. An abundance of prana flows through the nadis of a person with an awakened

manipura, therefore that person is disease-free; there is no need to go to the doctor for tonics and supplements. Rather, that person becomes a healer and just being in their presence has an energizing and healing effect.

No fear of fire: It is also said that such people have no fear of *agni* or fire. This is a quality of an awakened manipura. There are references in yogic and tantric literature regarding the performance of *panchagni sadhana*, the discipline of five fires, where the sadhaka performs mantra anushtana surrounded by five fires. The fire is just a symbol, however; it is a symbolic flame and offers no threat of burning the flesh. Sri Swamiji performed arduous sadhana for nine years during the hottest months and with four large fires surrounding him. On the last year of his panchagni sadhana there was no cover overhead; the hot Indian summer sun beat down on him relentlessly hour after hour every day, and flames were blazing around him. He was not afraid of the heat of the flames, rather he was filled with joy. For these reasons, we can say that Sri Swamiji had an awakened manipura.

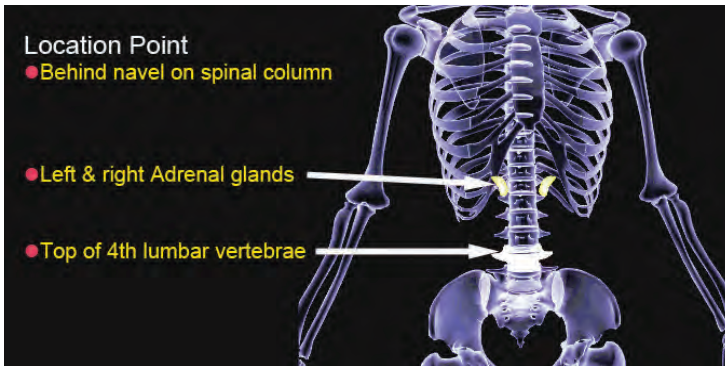
The yogi who concentrates on this chakra receives not only patala siddhi, but can acquire hidden treasures, be free from all diseases, have no fear of fire, and even if he's thrown into the burning fire, he remains alive without fear of death. This is supported by Sage Gheranda in the *Gheranda Samhita* which states (3:22–23):

The fire tattwa is situated at the navel; its colour is red like the indra-gop insect, its form is triangular, its seed mantra is *ra*, its presiding deity is Rudra. It is refulgent like the sun and the giver of success. Fix the prana along with the chitta in this tattwa for five *ghatikas* (approximately two hours). This is called 'fire dharana', the destroyer of the fear of dreadful death, and fire cannot injure him. If the practitioner is thrown into a burning fire, by virtue of this mudra, he remains alive, without fear of death.

2

Locating Manipura

The location point of manipura is behind the navel on the spinal column. This is at the top of the fourth lumbar vertebrae. The *kshetram* or chakra trigger point is located behind the navel in the frontal psychic passage and the chakra itself is within sushumna nadi situated in the spinal cord on top of the fourth lumbar vertebrae.



Locating manipura chakra and kshetram

Stand sideways in front of a mirror.

Place the finger of one hand on the navel and one finger of the other hand on the spine, directly behind.

Sit down and press firmly with the finger on the spine for one minute, then remove the finger.

As the pressure sensation continues, concentrate on the area slightly deeper in from that point.

This is the location of manipura chakra.

While feeling the pulse beat at this point, mentally repeat the chakra name, ‘manipura, manipura, manipura’ for a few minutes.

Raw or tempered manipura?

Adrenaline is a physical concomitant of manipura. The ability to be able to fight without fear of death is the quality of one who has adrenaline pumping through the blood. The behaviour of the fighter is like that. He thinks, ‘I’m here to fight. I’ll try to stay alive and finish the other one off.’ That is the purpose of fighting; that is the style of a fighter, a warrior. It is the energy of manipura.

Naturally, we have other aspects of our personality that come into play when there is conflict. Often one resorts to diplomacy and other tactics in order to forge one’s way into winning; the brutal physical conflict will always leave bitter negative impressions to deal with for many years to come, and that is why we don’t always meet the opposition with spears, swords and guns. We do it with our will, instead. We do it with our personality. We have the qualities of the other chakras as well as other aspects which curb our personality. A raw manipura, however, just an awakened manipura, would be a very rude fellow. He would be difficult to live with because his aggression would be so gross. The quality of manipura is not compassion. The manipura aspect of our personality doesn’t care for anyone, and if we have no compassion or feeling for anyone, then we are savages.

The first step in the training of warriors or army recruits is desensitization. The soldiers’ opinion of the enemy is influenced by verbal training sessions that tell them, “Those people on the other side, they’re not human, they’re animals.” These messages are repeated again and again. As a result, soldiers don’t have the weight of worry or compassion for others, and their efforts are not diminished by ordinary human qualities.

This is the quality of manipura and we do have these qualities in us. Sometimes we notice that we get a little bit too aggressive and we wonder, 'Why am I so aggressive?' We worry because we have different components of our personalities that have compassion and that think, 'Gee, I should be more polite.' We have all these different sets of instructions, including the energy coming from the manipura chakra that wants to forge ahead. Thus, unless we are clear within, we suffer from the moral dilemma created by the urge to brutally pursue our goals. The energy we get from our manipura centre can be expressed through our higher qualities enabling us to achieve, however, not at the cost of causing harm to others.

A little story can exemplify this. There was a lady in Tasmania, Australia, who lived with two men in a very wild place in the north-east corner of the island. These three were building a school of yoga. One man was a big, rotund, bossy guy who prayed to Hanuman for his strength. He was a real tough guy and he was the boss. He was the one who told the lady what to do all the time. Predictably, she worked in the kitchen and the garden, cleaning and doing other menial duties. The other man who lived with her was an intellectual. He was the architect, and while they were discussing and planning the building, the men kept telling her what to do and how to do it while they attended to all the important jobs.

She was a very frail, insignificant-looking person, a quiet person. She used to practise uddiyana bandha and nauli in the shower, two practices that awaken and stimulate manipura chakra. This situation continued for some time. She enjoyed practising uddiyana bandha and nauli, amazing herself at how she could isolate and manipulate her abdominal muscles, thinking, 'Oooh, look how nicely my stomach retracts and moves from side to side.' She loved doing nauli and she loved doing uddiyana bandha; it made her feel so good, so she just kept practising them in the shower every day.

After some time, the tables turned between the three people. She suddenly became the boss and was designing and deciding on construction issues, and the architect and

the Hanuman devotee were doing what she would say. The whole situation changed. They started cooking, they started fetching wood for the fire, they started doing the washing, they started doing the gardening, they did all that she had been doing before. The whole situation changed through activation of manipura and activation of her will.

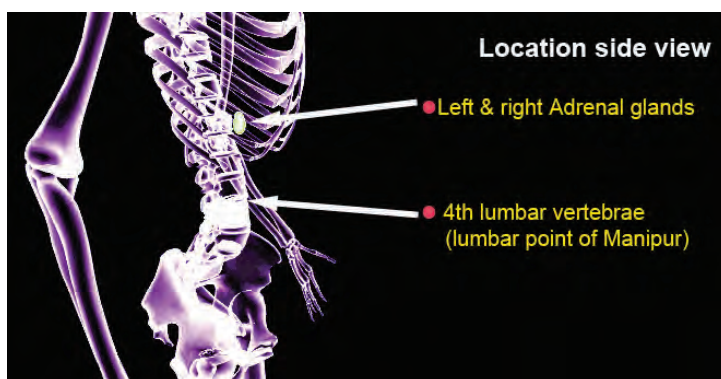
In every human interaction, there's always an element of will. A couple may be perfect lovers, a marriage made in heaven, but there is still the willpower of two individuals at play. For the relationship to continue, the willpower of one must be surrendered. How else can the power of two wills go ahead? It's nice to have the ideal 'united we stand'; however, there's always the problem of willpower. This lady awakened some of the power of manipura.

Navel chakra

Buddhists concentrate on their navel, thus the term 'navel chakra' became very famous as a consequence of Buddha. Since I've been a little boy, I've been hearing about Buddhists who concentrate on their navel. Nobody in my childhood knew much about Buddhists, Hindus or yogis, and much less about kundalini yoga, so it all seemed very strange and left us wondering why Buddha would spend his time gazing at his navel. People who criticize the yogic or spiritual pursuits make comments such as, "Those people are just navel gazers!" From their point of view, we are dismissed as being reasonable social members and instead categorized as irrational dreamers, or worse.

This idea of the navel chakra, made infamous by spiritually unaware people through their gossip of Lord Buddha's navel gazing, had valid and fundamental spiritual value. We concentrate on manipura because manipura is the spiritual home of kundalini shakti. We begin our spiritual pursuit from manipura.

The fourth lumbar vertebra is at the same level as the navel, associated with manipura, which is associated with the digestive system. When manipura is active, or activated



through the practice of such yogic techniques as uddiyana bandha, nauli and agnisara kriya, digestion will be powerful.

Associated organs and glands

The digestive organs and some of the surrounding area are associated with manipura: the stomach, the liver, the pancreas, the solar plexus, the kidneys, and the third to fourth lumbar vertebrae. The solar plexus is located at the pit of the stomach in that area of the body near the base of the sternum, and is described as a complex of ganglia and radiating nerves belonging to the sympathetic nervous system. The solar plexus is the physical aspect of manipura and the stimulation of these nerves are in harmonious correlation with the functions of manipura. There is a correlation between manipura chakra and the adrenal glands, because the power to fight the battles of life requires the injection of adrenaline, supplying personal power.

Manipura's abundant pranic energy ensures that the liver functions properly, providing healthy red blood cells, and that the pancreas as the regulator of blood sugar functions to produce insulin. The function of the kidneys is maintained through the prana of manipura, ensuring a balance of sodium and potassium levels in the body. Manipura also assists in the proper separation of nutritious blood from waste water, and directs the water to the urinary tract.

3

Centre of Prana

The following diagram, originally published in David Tansey's book, *Subtle Body*, is from an Indian painting of unknown origin. It displays how the chakras are composed of nadis. Prana, the vital force, flows through these nadis. This wonderful image reflects the experience of meditation within all the nadis and the beautiful lotus flowers along the spinal column. The kundalini lotus flowers are created by the flow of prana in the nadis.

The pranic system

The basic structure of the pranas stems from the kanda. The kanda is situated in the perineum between the anus and the root of the reproductive organs. It is egg-shaped and situated in the centre of the astral body. The nadis spring from the kanda and it is the beginning of the pranic flow. Amongst the 72,000 nadis, there are three most important ones, and these are known as ida, pingala and sushumna, plus eleven more nadis which are not as significant though important. These nadis centralize, or 'bunch up', as Swami Sivananda describes, in manipura.

The kanda is not the beginning of the whole system, nor is it in manipura. The whole of the psychic system, the whole of the pranic system, begins from anahata chakra. The seed is at anahata and the result is at the kanda, which grows up

to manipura. The diagram of 72,000 nadis is shown in the image below and many of these nadis have names.

The lotus of manipura

Ten-petalled lotus: Everyone has a ten-petalled lotus flower in manipura. Reputable texts such as *Kundalini Tantra* by Swami Satyananda, *Sat Chakra Nirupanam* as translated in *The Serpent Power* by Sir John Woodroffe and *Laya Yoga* by Shyama Sundara Goswami, as well as the Vedas and the Puranas all declare that manipura has ten petals. There is agreement between all reliable and respected literature about the number of petals and the aksharas on the petals, which leads us to say that this is spiritual testimony. These are all separate sources, independently written; they did



The network of nadis

not copy from each other. The ancient scriptures were not put into the written form until approximately two thousand years ago; however, scholars write that original records on cave walls depicting yantras and mantras look to be up to 20,000 years old. All texts declare that manipura has ten petals on which the aksharas ढं (Dam) ढं (Dham) णं (Nam) तं (Tam) थं (Tham) दं (Dam) धं (Dham) नं (Nam) पं (Pam) फं (Pham) are reflected.

Sanskrit language on the petals: Each of the ten petals of the manipura chakra has inscribed upon it a Sanskrit *akshara* or letter. The meditator experiences a different akshara and sound on each petal. From where do these aksharas arise, and why do they reflect the Indian culture and the Sanskrit language? Why do the mantras appear on the petals?

The same Devanagari aksharas appear on the petals even for people from other cultures that use different characters for their alphabet. Many thousands of years ago, when the great masters meditated on the lotus flowers in the chakras, they saw four petals in mooladhara, six in swadhisthana, ten in manipura, twelve in anahata, sixteen in vishuddhi and two in ajna, making a total of fifty aksharas, the total number of characters in the Devanagari alphabet. They saw all these letters and when they concentrated on the petals, they heard the sounds. From the sounds of the petals and aksharas written on them came the Sanskrit language.

The manipura lotus flower, with its ten petals and their pulsations, is formed by the nadis and the lights of prana. These petals are created by the flow of prana and they create a wonderful image inside the body; many different coloured petals with the aksharas, the letters, shining like the colour of lightning upon them. The petals vibrated with sound which was developed into a script, and this script became the source of the Sanskrit language. This is the source of the Sanskrit sounds. When we chant in Sanskrit, we experience a higher energetic state, which is the result of an increased flow of pranic energy and the resonance of the petals vibrating in harmony with the chanting. The inner vibration is the life

force, the prana. Without prana, we're finished. The Sanskrit definition of death is *prana nidhana*, the absence of prana. Not when the brain stops, not when the heart stops; these can stop, but prana can't. When prana stops, physical life ceases.

Lotus facing up or down: The subtle nadis have influence in the physical body. All the subtle prana nadis and the chakras have gross manifestations and operate in the physical body. Whenever there is a concentration of interlacing nerves, arteries and veins, that centre is called a plexus. The gross nerves and plexuses have a close relationship with the subtle nerves, the nadis. Since the physical centres have a close relationship with the astral centres, the vibrations that are produced in the physical centres through prescribed practices have an effect in the astral centres.

The known nerve plexuses existing in the physical body are the following: the cervical, brachial, coccygeal, lumbar, sacral, cardiac, oesophageal, hepatic, pharyngeal, pulmonary, prostatic, and others; these are the different physical, material plexuses. Similarly, there are plexuses or centres of vital force in the pranic system, springing from the kanda as mentioned previously, and they are known as lotuses or chakras: mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna and sahasrara.

The lotus flower chakras, along with their petals, hang downwards when kundalini is at mooladhara, and when kundalini is awakened, they turn toward the ascended kundalini at the *brahmarandhra*, the place on the crown of the head through which the soul of a yogi is said to exit when leaving the body. The lotus flowers always turn toward kundalini shakti, like sunflowers always facing the sun.

To make this quite clear: the lotus flowers face the direction where kundalini is residing. When kundalini shakti is sitting at mooladhara, the flowers hang facing down. When kundalini shakti rises up past swadhisthana, past manipura, past anahata and onwards to the brahmarandhra, the flowers face up. Kundalini shakti may be anywhere, and the flowers, the lotus flowers, face the direction of kundalini shakti.

4

Nectar of Immortality

The ramifications of the manipura lotus facing up or down are considerable. A psychic nectar flows from *bindu*, the point or psychic centre located in the brain at the posterior region of the head. The nectar of bindu is psychic, yet the experience is real, as if we are receiving honey from this point. The fluid flowing from bindu, often referred to as the nectar of immortality, is known as *amrita*, and it can become either poison or nectar depending on the awakening of the person.

Amrita drops down to the throat, rests on the tongue and then descends further to the manipura lotus. When a particular tongue mudra called khechari has been perfected, this amrita is effectively transformed into nectar on the tongue before further descending into the upward facing lotus of manipura. When the lotus faces upward, the nectar can be 'recycled' by being sent back up to bindu, and we can live an extended life free from the effects of ageing. When khechari mudra has not been perfected, the amrita cannot be neutralized. It becomes a poison and descends into the downward facing lotus where it is consumed. When this happens, we miss the benefits of the nectar and live a normal, worldly life-expectancy. Thus, this nectar is called amrita. Amrita is translated to mean nectar, but actually *mrit* means death and 'a' is a prefix indicating negation; therefore, *amrita* means immortality. By reversing the flow

of amrita and raising it back up, we can be blessed with immortality. This can be accomplished through the practices of kundalini yoga or by the practice of *amrita pan*, a kundalini practice that is a part of kundalini kriya yoga.

Understanding immortality

The purpose of amrita pan is to reverse the flow of amrita. This explanation of the flow of amrita raises some disagreement. The nectar of immortality, which we read about in yoga, is very appealing; everybody wants to be immortal. Nobody wants to die, and everybody has fear of death. We want to keep death away for as long as possible, yet nobody has managed to become immortal, though many people have lived for very long periods of time. It is said that Vyasdev wrote the Vedas and *Mahabharata* at Badrinath, India. It must have taken him thousands of years to complete such a task.

Some years ago I had darshan of Devraha Baba. He was reputed to have lived for eight hundred years. According to his disciples, Devraha Baba attended the wedding of Tulsidas, which took place at about 1550 AD. His name, Devraha, indicates he is a man who lives for a very long time. He was very old, and like everything else created must, he passed away a few years ago. He lived on a platform, and his feet never touched the ground. From his platform ran a plank, over which he walked directly into the river for bathing and walked back out again to sit up on his platform, and from here he would give talks and distribute *prasad*, blessed food or a gift, to visitors. The darshan of Devraha Baba was a refreshing and healing experience. He knew my guru. Though I was feeling very sick with influenza, I went to see him and I asked him some things. I went with a group of people and I asked him, "How can I purify the mind?" He said, "You just go on repeating the mantra." I thought, "I came all this way just to listen to that? I already knew that!" As I walked away, he kept throwing prasad to me from his elevated platform so that I could not leave. As he continued

this, my arms and dhotis were overflowing with a big bundle of prasad fruit. When I walked away to share the fruit with my friends, I noticed that I felt as though I was floating above the ground, and my feverish headache and congestion had disappeared. It was a worthwhile darshan.

One of our group members on that visit to Devraha Baba was a doctor who had visited Baba many times with his father when he was a child. This man's father would also visit Baba with his father, and in this way there was a whole family history of Baba's darshan within the one family, and they said Devraha Baba has always been the same. He lived a very long period of time. However, the point is, he was not immortal; only the soul is immortal and everything else is subject to change.

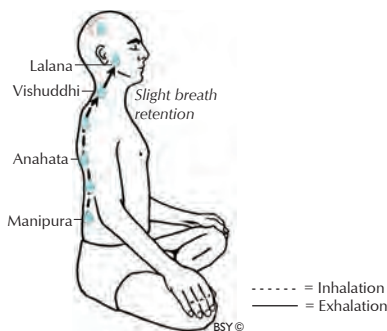
I have also met and seen quite a few yogis who arduously practise khechari mudra and other kriyas in order to reverse the flow of amrita, and they live a very long time. One hundred and fifty, one hundred and eighty years is not unusual. They do live for that extended period of time; however, they are not immortal, so we can say the description of amrita is the nectar for a very long life, not immortality.

Consciousness is immortal. It has always been and always will be. Without consciousness as a source, we could not exist, or it would imply that we came from nothing, which is philosophically and scientifically untenable. Even if we take the position that it all comes from God, then God is the immortal originating point. The universe has limited space and time; it was created and everything created must decay. Everything knowable is subject to creation and destruction. Only consciousness, Shiva, persists. He is the true symbol of immortality.

Reversing the flow of amrit

In the kriya practice of amrita pan, shown in the diagram, the nectar secreted from bindu flows and fills the sushumna passage. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* states that amrita fills the sushumna passage. We have various kriyas we can use

in order to bring the nectar back up from manipura, back up into the brain. Reversing the flow of amrita can also be done through other yogic practices, such as maha mudra, vipareeta karani mudra, and so on.



Amrit Pan

When the nectar fills sushumna, it is an experience that fills the whole body with a kind of sweetness. The experience is sweetness in the shoulders, sweetness in the arms. It is a very pleasant experience. This experience of the flow of amrita can be awakened through dedicated practices.

5

Energizing Pranamaya Kosha

Manipura lies within the *pranamaya kosha*, the energetic plane, sheath or body. Yoga believes that the human existence is made up of five koshas: *annamaya*, the physical body; *pranamaya*, the pranic body; *manomaya*, the mental body; *vijnanamaya*, the intuitive body; and *anandamaya*, the blissful body. In the pranamaya kosha we experience the pranic network, the energy systems within the body. Due to the energizing and activation of manipura, it is possible for kundalini shakti to ascend to manipura, benefiting from a higher energy state. With the thousands of nadis feeding out of manipura, more prana is now made available to the whole system. Pranamaya kosha is the link between the conscious and the subconscious brain.

Energizing resolve

When making a *sankalpa*, a positive resolve to give meaning and direction to life, the sankalpa needs energy to successfully superimpose its influence over the hundreds of directions the mind would like to follow. By repeating the sankalpa every day, using the same words, in the same way, day after day, after some time, the message in the subconscious takes a powerful place in the mind. It makes a deep impression that superimposes itself as being more powerful than all the other impressions in the subconscious mind. Rather than running off to the shop, running off to the cinema or starting up and following new hopeful ideas,

we have a strong, healthy, consciously-decided direction in mind. This behaviour is normal for a yogi and rare for the average person. With the enhanced power of decision, worldly pursuits and spiritual pursuits can both be successful.

When kundalini shakti is seated in manipura and pranamaya kosha is energized, we have energy for that decision and we do not have to repeat the sankalpa again and again; one resolution is enough to bring about the change. Such a sankalpa is not just a wish, and for this reason we have to be very careful. At least in yoga nidra we have time to reconsider, ‘Oh, perhaps I shouldn’t make that sankalpa. Maybe I had better reconsider and change it.’ Then, if you have the power of decisiveness, once decided upon, it happens. It goes into the subconscious mind and it becomes an event in your life. Ill-considered resolutions can lead to conflicts even though an idea seems good at the time. A typical example of a poorly chosen sankalpa might be, ‘I will never eat again’ or ‘I will never talk to him again’, because suddenly you’re doing it; you start to get wafer-thin and people start saying, “You must eat!” Once the mind has a strong sankalpa, nothing can change it. You have to be careful about what you decide upon; you have to be able to filter your decisions.

Swah loka

Swah loka is the level of manipura chakra. Swah loka is a higher loka than bhuh loka and bhuvah loka. Bhuh and bhuvah lokas are the earthly and mental levels, and swah loka is beyond those. At the level of swah loka, we are capable of living, deciding, creating and manipulating our lives to its best effect. We’re not hampered as much by the pulls and entanglements of the old habits. We are at a higher spiritual level as well. Swah loka is the beginning of the spiritual realm.

Much of the scientific journalism on the biological wonders of our world seem to endlessly deal with physical aspects, such as the development of the skull or the size of a jaw bone. Darwin’s theory of evolution is physical and based on the non-caring, non-compassionate and relentless pursuit

of individual survival, yet this cannot be the case. We evolve through all our koshas, all our bodies: the physical, energetic or pranic, mental, astral and spiritual bodies. We exist on all levels whether we are aware of it or not, and as our kundalini ascends and we develop our human qualities, our existence is transformed to higher levels. This point is never appreciated by mainstream journalistic presentations. When watching popular anthropological science shows on television presented by science journalists, one becomes aware of the single level on which research is based. There are many documentaries depicting how ancient man survived and how we have evolved and how, when we started eating grain, our brains expanded and the shape of our head changed, and when we did this, the jaw changed. That is all it is concerned with. Every time I watch those programs, I am always thinking, 'What about the other aspects of our evolution?'

The pranamaya kosha evolves. It has been evolving and will continue to evolve. As we refine our energy, higher awareness manifests to the level of swah loka where the spiritual realm of awareness begins. Science seems to come to a halt at the physical state of evolution; the journalist marvels at the ability of man to create agricultural and hunting implements, but that is just ordinary stuff, borne from the necessities of life. What about the altruistic developments of language, poetry, music and art? The fact that people can create a culture, have visions for the welfare of a nation and produce many wonderful, noble ideas and insights does not figure in the scientific analysis of our evolution at all, or at least in that portion reported to us interested members of the public. However, this is a very important part of our evolution.

The path ahead

Awakening manipura is awakening the swah level of consciousness. This is the first spiritual realm, where the aspirant gets a view of the great path ahead. Sri Swamiji writes: "Human evolution takes place through seven planes in the same way that kundalini awakens in the seven chakras. When

the consciousness evolves to manipura, the sadhaka acquires a spiritual perspective. He gets a glimpse of the higher lokas or planes of existence. From mooladhara and swadhisthana, the planes cannot be seen. Therefore, the limitations of perception in the lower planes are responsible for the misuse of siddhis or powers which begin to manifest there. Only when the sadhaka reaches manipura is he able to visualize the future, and before him is the infinite state of consciousness, which is no longer gross and empirical. It stretches before him endlessly, full of beauty, truth and auspiciousness. In the face of the vision of all this, his views are completely changed: the personal prejudices and biases and complexes drop away, as the endless beauty and perfection of the higher worlds go on within the consciousness. At mooladhara and swadhisthana, one has one's own mental and emotional problems. However, from manipura, the swah loka, one sees the bliss and noble views, perfect ideas and greater possibilities of human consciousness. Then, whatever one thinks and does will be influenced by this higher vision."

The fog of emotional problems is transformed. Imagine: you can see the way to God. The path ahead is in front of you! What an inspiration for the seeker! He can know the way, not just follow guidelines and teachings. He can look up into the sky or look within and the way is clear, the path is obvious, it is there! Just as if you've been struggling through the forest, wondering, 'Where is the way out of here? Nothing but trees all around; does this path lead me out into the sunlight? How am I going to find the spiritual path?' Before manipura awakens, we guess at the right action thinking, 'I'll do asana, I'll do pranayama. Okay, I'll do japa. Okay, I'll do mantra.' However, you can't see anything. Until you reach manipura, it is all guesswork and then you climb up on to a high rock where you can see and think, 'Yes! I can see the way to God! I know the way. I can see it!' Ah, it's a great relief. At last, we can see something ahead. Otherwise, so far, we have been running on belief, mantra and other techniques, although there's nothing to see. Therefore, manipura awakening is important and the beginning of real spiritual insight.

6

The Petals of Manipura

About seven hundred years ago, Swami Poornananda, the Bengali master of kundalini yoga, wrote in the classic text, *Sat Chakra Nirupananam* (v. 19): “Above it, and at the root of the navel, is the shining lotus of ten petals.” In verse 18, he finished the verses on swadhisthana so ‘above it’ means above swadhisthana.

This classic text appeared in Sir John Woodroffe’s *The Serpent Power* and was the first publication available to the West on tantra and kundalini yoga. In his book are these words: “Above it, and at the root of the navel, is the shining lotus of ten petals, of the colour of heavily laden rain clouds. Within it are the letters ढ (Dam) to ढ (Pham), of the colour of the blue lotus with the nada and bindu above them. Meditate there on the region of fire, triangular in form and shining like the rising sun. Outside it are the three swastika marks, and within, the bija of Vahni himself . . .”

Traditional symbology

The traditional symbology varies throughout the literature. Swami Poornananda’s experience was that the ten petals have the colour of heavy rain-laden clouds. Sri Swamiji’s petals were described as being bright yellow. In Sri Swamiji’s kundalini experiences of the chakras, reported in *Kundalini Tantra*, many colours were different from other texts. He was recognized as an original thinker and

his experiences were original also. In fact, the colours in manipura vary more than in other chakras. The texts say green, blue, smoky, black, and so on. Swami Sivananda and *Sat Chakra Nirupanam* say manipura is the colour of dark rain clouds. In *Kankamalini Tantra* and other sources the colour nila is reported. According to the



Manipura chakra

Monier Williams Sanskrit Dictionary, *nila* means ‘of a dark colour, dark blue or dark green or black; dyed with indigo’. With the various descriptions of nila, it is understandable that the eminent scholars over the centuries have commented on their various colour experiences. Great sadhakas translate nila as dark, dark rain clouds, blue, black, or green. Manipura has also been described as gold in *Gandharvat Tantra* and red in *Shaktanandatarangini*.

Let’s conclude that the chakra can be yellow or violet or blue or black or green or grey or smoky, and they are the experiences of the various sadhakas. The deeper we go into the available texts, the more varied experiences we will find.

The petals

There are ten petals in the lotus of manipura. Each of the petals is inscribed with an akshara and they range from the first petal with *Dam* to the tenth petal with *Pham*. Quoting from *Sat Chakra Nirupanam*: “Within it are the letters ढं (*Dam*) to फं (*Pham*), of the colour of the blue lotus with the nada and bindu above them . . .” *Sat Chakra Nirupanam* always describes the aksharas as having a nada and bindu above them. The colour of the letters is nila, according to *Sat Chakra Nirupanam*, discussed above. In the *Bhutashuddhi Tantra* and *Kankamalini Tantra*, the letters are lightning-like. Sometimes it is written

that the petals are black and the aksharas are also black. So, the colour of the letters varies as well as the petals.

By concentrating on each petal after prolonged meditation, pranayama and mantra recitation, the individual sounds emanate from each petal. These are the sounds of the aksharas inscribed on the petals. Once we have mastered kundalini, we have the capacity to be able to concentrate on each petal individually, and discover the sound that is emanating from the petal, and also see the akshara, the Devanagari letter, together with its nada and bindu. It is from the experience of the sound emanating from each petal, together with its Devanagari akshara, that the spoken and written Sanskrit language has evolved. This is why Sanskrit is often referred to as the mother of all languages and the name of the script, Devanagari, is made up of two words: *deva*, meaning God or divinity, and *nagari* meaning city.

There are many yogic references to the human body being a city with nine gates and the divine script within that body or city. Thus, we can appreciate the depth of understanding and experience of the masters of kundalini in ancient times and the effectiveness of their teachings, which have survived to this day. Even if everyone on the planet were to be extinguished and a new civilization reborn, Devanagari would survive, because it is a coding within the



Manipura chakra with akshara

pranamaya kosha, the subtle energy body, which in turn has its seeds in cosmic consciousness, the source from which everything came and which cannot be destroyed, burnt, cut or dampened.

Akshara on the petals are:

डं (Dam) ढं (Dham) णं (Nam)
 तं (Tam) थं (Tham) दं (Dam)
 धं (Dham) नं (Nam) पं (Pam)
 फं (Pham).

Petal No.	Akshara	Letter
1	डं	Dam
2	ढं	Dham
3	णं	Nam
4	तं	Tam
5	थं	Tham
6	दं	Dam
7	धं	Dham
8	नं	Nam
9	पं	Pam
10	फं	Pham

In his book *Laya Yoga*, Shyam Sunder Goswami writes: “Black letters with black petals indicate a predominance of prana vayu.” He explains the various colours of the petals and the various colours of the aksharas as being due to the different flows of prana.

Whilst giving full credit to the authority and status of Shyam Sunder Goswami, his book contains such extensive and detailed research that it must have taken him a lifetime to prepare his book. It has many references to significant but hard to access texts and much valuable information that I find difficult to understand, for instance ‘prana is black’. Neither prana, nor apana, udana, samana nor vyana are black. None of the *pancha pranas*, the five major divisions of pranic energy, are black. I have seen prana. Many people have seen prana in their practices. You can see it in the air. It is like little dazzling white points. You can see it inside. It’s like lightning flashes or dashes of light. I don’t understand how he came to this conclusion; however, he is a very advanced kundalini sadhaka and he has written a wonderful book. It is a valuable resource. Shyam Sunder Goswami writes that the colour variation of the aksharas and the petals is due to the predominance of the different pranas. He says if it is red, it is a combination of prana and apana and if it is black, it is due to prana alone.

7

Vrittis of Manipura

When the mind comes into contact with an object, whether that object is physical or mental, whether it is a vision or a thought or a feeling, the reaction or recognition that the mind has with that object is a *vritti*, a modification of the mental thought patterns. For example, if I'm sitting in meditation and some nice pink shape comes to my mind's eye, first I just see it. Then I think, 'Ooh, I'm looking at a rose. A pink rose. It's beautiful.' The cognition that a beautiful shape is in my mind is a *vritti*. The recognition of the shape, knowing what a rose looks like, and my like or dislike for it transfers its connection into the intellect, into the memory bank as a *vritti*.

Vrittis and mental modifications

As we know from Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, the *vrittis* have to be transcended and ultimately stopped. It is when they become subtle that they can be stopped. These *vrittis* on manipura's petals are a part of our psychological makeup; these are human characteristics and the potential is within all humans. Many humans have lived through some of the turmoil these qualities bring. Take jealousy as an example. It is the fear of losing someone you love when they give their love or attention to someone else. If that person you love then leaves you, and you are suffering and all alone, the jealousy is transformed into hatred. If your lover then returns

to give you affection, the hatred is transformed again into love. When your love is turned toward God or guru, that love is unconditional, non-possessive; it cannot be threatened, it transcends waxing and waning. Love affairs of the ordinary human heart and the vrittis have been transcended, but this is not a decision; it is an experience deep in meditation or in the clarity of the post-meditative state.

Vrittis on the petals

The vrittis and corresponding petals are:

Petal No.	Vritti
1	Spiritual Ignorance
2	Thirst
3	Jealousy
4	Treachery
5	Shame
6	Fear
7	Disgust
8	Delusion
9	Foolishness
10	Sadness

We must transcend these qualities in our personality so that the lotus will open and kundalini shakti will be able to progress from manipura and rise further. We first have to liberate ourselves from these vrittis.

Spiritual ignorance: Spiritual ignorance is identification with the false and the unreal. It is identifying with the individual, with the illusory, with maya rather than the universal consciousness. It is the beginning of suffering. Spiritual ignorance is the beginning of suffering; there's a kind of agony we all have, called *klesha*. This agony is caused by the fact that we have spiritual ignorance.

Rumi was a thirteenth century Persian poet and a great Sufi who loved God dearly. God was his home. He wrote a

beautiful poem about the mournful tune of the reed flute. He said that the reed flute plays its haunting, sorrowful tune because the reed was plucked from its home in the bed of reeds, and now it is playing out the sorrowful tune of wanting to return from where it came. It is our tune, the tune of humankind wanting to be back home to be with our true selves, the home within, the home of spiritual knowledge. Once attained, we have reached the end of suffering, the end of klesha and of course, the end of spiritual ignorance. The poem goes:

*Listen to the reed, how it is complaining!
It is telling about separations,*

*Saying, "Ever since I was severed from the reed field,
men and women have lamented in the presence of my shrill cries.*

*I want a heart torn, torn from separation,
so that I may explain the pain of yearning.*

*Anyone one who has remained far from his roots,
seeks a return to the time of his union.*

*I lamented in every gathering;
I associated with those in bad or happy circumstances.*

*But everyone became my friend from his own opinion;
he did not seek my secrets from within me.*

*My secret is not far from my lament,
but eyes and ears do not have the light to sense it.*

*The body is not hidden from the soul, nor the soul from the
body; but seeing the soul is not permitted."*

*The reed's cry is fire – it's not wind!
Whoever doesn't have this fire, may he be nothing! It is the fire of
Love that fell into the reed.
And it is the ferment of Love that fell into the wine.*

*The reed is the companion of anyone who was severed from a
friend; its melodies tore our veils.*

*Who has seen a poison and a remedy like the reed?
Who has seen a harmonious companion and a yearning friend like
the reed?*

*The reed is telling the story of the path full of blood;
it is telling stories of Majnoon's crazed love.*

*There is no confidant of this understanding except the
senseless! There is no purchaser of that tongue except the ear of the
mystic.*

*In our longing, the days became like evenings;
the days became fellow-travellers with burning fevers.*

*If the days have passed, tell them to go and don't worry.
You remain! – O You, whom no one resembles in Purity!*

*Everyone becomes satiated by water, except the fish.
And everyone who is without daily food finds that his days become
long.*

*None who is 'raw' can understand the state of the 'ripe'.
Therefore, this speech must be shortened. So farewell!*

*O son, break the chains and be free!
How long will you be shackled to silver and gold?*

*If you pour the sea into a jug,
how much will it contain? Just one day's portion.*

*The jug of the eye of the greedy will never be filled.
And as long as the oyster is not content, it will never be filled by
a pearl.*

*Anyone whose robe is torn from love,
becomes completely purified from greed and defect.*

*Be joyous! O our sweet melancholy Love!
O doctor of all our diseases!*

*O Medicine of our pride and vanity!
O you are our Plato and our Galen!*

*The earthly body went up to the heavens from Love!
The mountain began to dance and became agile!*

*O lover! Love became the soul of Mount Sinai!
Mount Sinai became drunk 'and Moses fell down senseless'!*

*If I were joined with the lip of a harmonious companion,
I too would utter speeches like the reed!*

*But anyone who becomes separated from one of the same tongue
becomes without a tongue, even if he has a hundred songs to share.*

*When the rose has gone and the garden has passed away,
you will no longer hear from the nightingale about what happened.*

*The Beloved is All, and the lover a veil;
the Beloved is Living, and the lover a corpse.*

*When Love has no concern for him,
he is left like a bird without wings. Misery for him!*

*How can I have awareness of before and behind,
when the Light of my Beloved is no longer before and behind?*

*Love wants these words to manifest.
But how is it that the mirror reveals nothing?*

*Do you know why your mirror reveals nothing?
Because the rust is not separated from its face!*

Rumi is not writing about the love of a man or woman, but love for the Divine. His poetry is often misinterpreted as being love for a human being and this comes from many of the faulty translations. Rumi belonged to a Sufi order where the practice was to cleanse the heart of traits like jealousy, treachery, shame, fear, disgust, delusion, foolishness, and other characteristics which *avidya*, ignorance, is composed of.

Thirst: Thirst summarizes our basic quest, be it physical, mental, emotional or spiritual. Thirst could also be translated as strong or haunting desire. Maybe our thirst is for the highest knowledge or to perform some immoral

or criminal act. The petal will not release its energy into the nadi until we are satisfied either with or without the attainment of our quests. This is evident in the cultural shift toward digitization. With this shift, there is a social movement for the ownership of modern smart phones, smart readers, smart multimedia and other smart devices, and there are millions in this mental movement questing to have the latest up-to-date gadgets and software.

We know that to pursue this path is false and illusory; it involves constantly learning fifty new styles of software, and fifty new techniques: how to use the map function, how to use the camera function, how to use messaging, how to use the verbal instruction function, and so on. We know that if we follow this path it will only be a headache, yet the forces of thirst remain as though there is a worldwide movement toward acquisition of the latest electronic gadgets. This must be transcended. How can one get rid of such a thirst? It can be transcended by identifying with the real things. Knowledge of higher reality is far more satisfying. Once we have had the taste of divine reality, desires for worldly objects, no matter how up-to-date, how shiny or how popular the thing is, will have no attraction for us. Illustrating this point, Swami Sivananda wrote that the penny sweet would hold no attraction to the person who has had the finest Belgian chocolate in his mouth.

From the spiritual perspective, this raises an apparent conundrum due to the illogicality of this situation. In order for kundalini to pass through manipura, we need to open the lotus petals and let the prana flow. However, to do this we have to identify with the highest consciousness and let go of thirst. The answer is practical, not logical. By



Manipura chakra with vrittis

leading a disciplined, simple life of sadhana, the thirst for other things becomes insignificant and does not influence or divert the sadhaka from the path.

Jealousy: When jealousy comes up it can overwhelm your whole state. Some people, after experiencing jealousy, change their lifestyle and decide never to be with a partner again. I know a woman in Melbourne, Australia, who had a boyfriend. He was faithful and loyal yet she imagined he was unfaithful to her on a daily basis. As a result, she agonized over the situation she had put herself in; it was self-inflicted jealousy. One coping technique to get over jealousy is to be able to love both, the partner and the new lover. When you love both of them equally, then you may be able to conquer jealousy. Paralyzed by the pangs of jealousy we struggle to extricate ourselves, yet the real solution is not to reach out for coping techniques but to suffer and wait for the suffering to subside. The ultimate solution comes through loving the infinite Cosmic Source of all beings, rather than neurotically concentrating on one individual. Just as in the discussion of the vrittis of the previous petals, spiritual ignorance and thirst, we discovered that identifying with the highest consciousness brings satisfaction, so also to overcome jealousy we need to cultivate a deep experience of the infinite. Simply deciding to turn the heart to the highest consciousness is the first step; however, the path is long.

When we are controlled by the vritti, we suffer. Jealousy is one of the most painful conditions to live with, and it is from this suffering that we search for a solution. Psychological tricks and living by angelic proclamations do not rid our habitual natures of the cause of suffering. Adopting a spiritual direction in life is the first step, but it is not until Ma Kundalini ascends and higher consciousness dawns that we can have the broader perspective. From here, we gain the ability to see how foolish possessiveness and jealousy are. We can instead choose to follow the spiritual path to the goal and adore the Divine above all else. When we love the

Divine, we feel no threat by others loving the Divine. No one else's love of the Divine can diminish ours.

Treachery: When somebody has deceived us and worked against us behind our back, we feel something exceptional, something very bad, and this is treachery. When we are suffering from a deceit, it is a truly awful feeling, and we just don't know what to do. How does one transcend this?

Treachery is a two-sided coin. On one side, we have the capacity to be the victim of betrayal, as in the above example, and on the other side, we have the capacity to be disloyal and cheat on someone who has trust in us. Sometimes we are forced into a situation where we have to choose between two people or parties that have put their trust in us. To choose either one will involve the suffering of the other. If this is done consciously, we must restore trust in the injured party after the event. Loyalty is a wonderful quality, but we all must endure periods of disloyalty. Treachery is caused when we seek to gain some kind of advantage: a profit, a promotion or lover, and is evident when we choose to ignore the love and affection for those around us and identify instead with this gain to our personal story. To make matters worse, often situations are manipulated so that treachery is concealed, and this can carry guilt. Human behaviour certainly weaves a tangled web. Freedom comes when we accept the treachery and continue to love all concerned. It can only be transcended when we act for a higher purpose and seek nothing for our personal selves. Then the petal opens and kundalini can pass through.

Shame: Shame is the self-reproach we suffer because we feel that our physical or mental appearance or reputation has diminished in some way. Maybe our physical appearance is tarnished by being overweight, or the teeth are crooked, or we have some other disfigurement and shame is suffered from these conditions. Of course, shame is felt if we are caught red-handed doing some immoral or illegal act, but also if we can't understand a point in class and we hesitate to ask in public for fear of humiliation. In both cases we

worry about our reputation as an accepted social member. Everyone knows what shame is. Small children wet the bed and they feel shameful. As we grow, there is likely to be quite a few shameful things we have done and regretted, and whether it comes to be known or not, the shame is there. Shame is recognized by the judiciary as being a part of the punishment for crime, therefore the wrongdoing is often exposed.

As long as we identify with the external existence we will suffer shame, because no life is perfect. Every life will have frailties, blemishes, indecencies, and these imperfections must be accepted. Nobody else accepts our imperfections, but we must. Accepting our imperfections and faults can allow us to live without suffering shame and let kundalini pass on through manipura.

Fear: Fear of the dark, fear of the unknown, fear of the future, fear of the past, fear of destruction, there is so much fear suffered in the world. The fear may be due to feeling threatened, either towards the physical body or any other part of worldly identity. Anything that threatens to extinguish or diminish us, or any part of our life that we call 'ours' stimulates fear. An impending tax bill can be feared, and even God is feared among fundamental religious adherents. We can deal with fear, which is always within, by facing it. Normally, we do not have to put ourselves into scary situations just to conquer fear. Life is full of situations which have the potential to make us fearful.

Often that which is threatened is not there, it is imagined, so we have to accept the fear and live through it. Some people go to extremes to conquer fear. They climb sheer cliff faces or walk tightropes at great heights. Actually, there are enough situations in life to be able to tackle our fears without having to contrive situations which challenge our ability to face fear. Life itself is the teacher. The lessons start when we are little kids. Fear is a debilitating part of anyone's life, and it definitely hinders our spiritual life. Often, the experiences felt in meditation become so frightening that

we stop the practice, when actually we must conquer our fears through understanding and awareness. Of course, it is easier to say than to put into practice; however, when the opportunity comes we must accept it. If facing fear becomes too overwhelming, if the heart starts beating furiously, the brow starts sweating, the palms perspire and we can't face it, then relax, analyze and isolate just what the fear is, and resolve to face it the next time.

I once had a yoga student who would be overcome by fear when sitting for the first stage of nadi shodhana pranayama. Each time she left the room and was not to be seen until the next week. I pleaded with her to face the demon within so she could see that an emotional turmoil was being triggered. After bravely persisting for some months, she managed to face her fear, and it disappeared.

Another yoga student would leave the room whenever yoga nidra practice started because she feared the sensation of falling. The classroom had a big solid floor, thus her fear was a psychic experience of falling or dropping into a black space; it was quite literally 'all in the mind'. She refused to try and face the experience, and she is probably still carrying that fear today, many years later.

Disgust: Why do we recoil with horror at certain things, yet are elated and attracted to others? Many children in the West desire pre-packaged fast food, and ordinary food, having no social appeal, brings up their stubborn rejection due to disgust. Disgust is a quality that is created. Often children copy others on what to be disgusted with. Everyone has both the potential to be disgusted and to be the targets of disgust; the objects of disgust are varied. We can conquer it.

During my sannyasa training days with Swami Satyananda in the 1970s, Sri Swamiji had a knack for selecting situations, people and jobs that we found disagreeable, and sometimes plain disgusting, and challenging us with them. Once an ashram key fell into the toilet and nobody would pick it out. It wasn't even a dirty toilet. Everybody in the room found it too disgusting to put their hand in the toilet and fish it out.

At that moment Sri Swamiji came in, saw the problem, simply put his hand in the toilet and brought the key out with a smile. The lesson was appreciated by all.

That certain things are considered disgusting has nothing to do with the quality of the object; rather, it is due to the opinionated mind which is manifesting its innate quality of disgust. For example, tanks used to decompose human waste products and other sewage, called septic tanks, are a feature of the Australian outback and they have to be pumped clean every two years or so. I once hired such a contractor who called his business 'Mr Whiffy' because whiffy means bad-smelling. As he was finishing his job he called me over to see how clean the tank was, and to demonstrate he put his arm in as far as it could reach and gave a broad sweep of the wall to show that there was just a brown smear remaining and very few solid bits. He loved his job and took great pride in how clean he left his pumped out tanks. This fellow was a lesson in overcoming disgust for human faeces.

Psychological studies on disgust began with Charles Darwin. When a primitive and naked native of South America touched the meat in Darwin's sandwich, the native was disgusted because the meat was so soft; however, Darwin was disgusted because the naked native had touched his food.

I chose excrement as an example for disgust because it has been noted that babies and children are not disgusted by excrement at all, it is only when mothers catch their babies playing with it or eating it that they train the baby or child to be disgusted with excrement. So the object of disgust is learned, not innate. The vritti of disgust is in us all, and in order to transcend this vritti we have to deal with things that disgust us.

Disgust often rules the behaviour of many people and in some cases it becomes obsessive. Some people feverishly wash their hands so often and always try to appear ultra clean, not because they are clean, but because they subconsciously feel that their minds are full of disgusting, dirty things, that they want to purge themselves of. Rather

than remain at a superficial or external level of cleanliness, yoga recognizes the fact that humans do carry a lot of dirt and negativity in the mind, and offers a method to purge it of its unwanted junk. Cleanliness or *shaucha* is one of the *niyamas* or disciplines of Sage Patanajali's *Yoga Sutras*, and it refers to cleanliness of the body and the mind. This practice will rid the mind of its 'dirt' faster than washing the hands thirty times a day!

As a part of my sannyasa training in Munger I had the task of cleaning toilets, and after some weeks, cleaning toilets became just the same as any other cleaning job. When I did my training, the swamis would take pride in how clean the toilets were just as people are proud of their pearly white smile. So, these things can be easily overcome, and the alternative is to let the disgust and the filth of toilets sit and fester in the mind. Let's get it out!

Delusion: This is the false belief that many carry around with them and live their lives by. Maybe it is a painful delusion, such as believing everybody dislikes them, or maybe it is the delusion of wishful thinking, such as feeling that they are going to win the lottery. Either way, it is identification with or belief in a particular thought, and on account of this identification, we will suffer our delusions because they will only lead us to paths of futility and frustration. Sooner or later, the mind will ask, 'Do the facts add up?'

Many yoga students experience psychic currents in the spine and delude themselves that the kundalini has awakened. It becomes part of their conversation and persona and sooner or later they will have to confront the personal question, 'Where is my expanded consciousness? Where are my intuitive powers? Why don't people flock to me like they did to Swami Sivananda, Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjanananda or other such awakened souls?' Often we come out of one delusion and move into another in a continually changing series of delusions. Socially, we are still considered acceptable and not thought of as insane, just a bit odd. Others suffer from more common forms of delusion

such as believing that money, power and position brings satisfaction and happiness.

Sooner or later we release ourselves from our delusions, and in order to avoid falling into yet another, we make strong spiritual decisions to believe in guru, in God, and in mantra. We decide to watch the mind and to perform *seva*, roughly translated to mean selfless service, and without believing automatically in anything and everything that it may propose, we make a commitment to believe in reality and let it support our hopes and dreams.

Foolishness: This is the curious tendency to create positive achievements in life and then proceed to make foolish decisions based on impulse, resulting in loss of reputation, loss of status, loss of faith, and finally, the discontinuation of good pursuits. Changes in life's paths must be carefully considered. Initially, in our early years, we don't have much choice in matters. We all need an education. It is only in adulthood, when we have freedom of choice, that we can make our own decisions, be they foolish or wise. Foolishness is a quality usually recognized in retrospect. We learn our lessons, yet make the same foolish mistakes again until our personality matures to the point where we can avoid foolishness even when the temptation is there. There is much foolishness in romantic and family life and in this area, we learn much or fall down the same hole again and again.

Sadness: Sadness is a kind of emotional hole that we can fall into when disappointment strikes. Sadness can infect the whole life, as if hopelessness is there. Lurking in our mind, in our psyche, is the tendency for sadness and hopelessness. The worldly path is full of hopes, they are called karmas. Every karma leads to dissatisfaction. We do everything with the hope that it will make us content and happy. We take out mortgages and buy houses with the hope that we will be happy having the security a house offers, yet we find ourselves enslaved to the bank and to the house with its upkeep and maintenance. Thus, getting a house or any wonderful object is a happy event that eventually

leads to enslavement and continued duty, which can lead to disappointment and result in sadness.

Life is an endless cycle of happiness and sadness. To get out of sadness, we create another idea and pursue it with vigour and hard work, only to have it result in yet another disappointment. When sadness descends upon us for a longer period of time, it often leads to a condition termed 'depression'. Pharmaceutical companies have developed many antidepressant medicines and in the West they are doing a roaring trade. The World Health Organization predicts that by 2020, depression will rival heart disease as the health disorder with the highest disease burden in the world.

Seva, selfless karma or selfless action, offers no direct rewards or riches, no wage or title; it is work for the upliftment and maintenance of people and projects that are not ours. Whether we work for the church, for the ashram, for the orphanage or the unrepresented, downtrodden and impoverished, we get no personal reward. We perform these duties out of a selfless commitment to something bigger, and expand our awareness from our own individual needs to the needs of others. In performing this selfless action we begin to experience something more wonderful than money or fame. We gradually develop an expanded heart that feels for others and transcends the individual sadness. We begin to notice that it is possible to care for others and get satisfaction from serving their needs. Naturally, the process takes many years, if not lifetimes, and the true reward is the end of suffering and sadness.

Effect of the vrittis

The vrittis are reflected in our personality. After a sufficient degree of kundalini awakening we can concentrate on the petals and identify the vrittis that are there in each petal. Amazingly, within the whole body of tantra there is concurrence more or less between the ten petals and the ten vrittis; all the masters have had the same experience. Just as in the physical body we all have a stomach, we all

have intestines, we all have bowels, we all have these same qualities, yet our DNA and our fingerprints vary. Even though we all have the same psychological and psychic building blocks, each of us has developed into a unique individual according to the decisions, choices and desires made through lifetimes.

The vrittis are unchangeable and so long as there is life, the potential to fall into their traps is there. We have to pray for a mother who will give us enlightened training so that our attitude toward them can be changed. We can't avoid the potential to be suspicious or suffer from shame.

The awakened yogi knows intuitively when a person is trying to cheat, and he accepts this without reservation. Swami Sivananda always accepted everyone into his ashram, including those who stole blankets and light bulbs and whatever else could be stolen. When serial offenders would come, his comment would be, "*Swagatam*" – "Welcome", and to his assistants who were warning him, Swami Sivananda would say, "That was last time, now he comes as a new visitor. Let him have another chance."

Sri Swamiji was always renowned for his statements. One such statement was, "I am shameless." After his panchagni sadhana, Sri Swamiji wore only the briefest of *kaupheens*, loincloths, and he was so innocent, similar to a child who would wear a small cloth that nobody would think anything about. Respectable devotees from every level of society loved him just as he was.

Just as the different parts of the physical brain have their functions and can be correlated to a variety of functions of the mind, we have the planets, the astrological signs and the awareness of their influence on us. Dr Tony Nader presented his book, *Human Physiology*, as a PhD thesis to his professors in the United States and went on to become the Chief Medical Officer at the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In his book, he demonstrates how the planets and astrological signs exist within the anatomy of the brain. It is a fascinating study that explains how we and

the universe are painted with the same brush, and how our vrittis come into the picture. The planets, with their aspects and positions in various astrological signs, are a measure of our karmas. They show why and how each one of us has a tendency to behave in a certain way, and also how it comes to be that our lives are more influenced by some vrittis than others. Since the time of Ptolemy and his famous Greek texts on astrology, astrologers around the world have been saying, "As above, so below."

Accidental awakening

Many people experience premature, unintended or accidental awakenings of kundalini before they have matured through the experiences of the vrittis, either through overdoing practices without proper guidance or by a physical accident, such as sometimes happens after a car crash. In another kind of situation, a desperate, selfish need for power causes the awakening, where so much energy goes into the pursuit of power that kundalini awakens, although unfortunately without the maturing of the personality. The results are distorted personalities in powerful positions, capable of all kinds of cruelty. Throughout history, distorted, immature individuals rise to very powerful positions. These people run their gangs or countries ridiculously, with merciless tyranny and violent maintenance of their power and position. Such people rise to the top in society because they are powerful. They have the power of manipura and they identify with this power; they feel they are great and were born to rule. Recent history is replete with such dictators. The cruel tyrannical actions of such people are practically unbelievable. They did not rise to these positions of power and control through education or by gaining respect. Often, despite advanced age or illness or even while being held in jail, they continue to rule and nobody can stand against them. That is the power of manipura. These people are immature; they have not gone through the maturing of the vrittis.

8

Symbology of the Fiery Lotus

In *Sat Chakra Nirupanam*, we are instructed (v. 19):

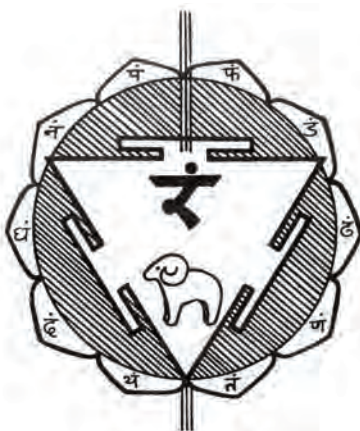
Meditate there, on the region of fire, triangular in form and shining like the rising sun. Outside the triangle are the three swastika marks and within, the bija of Vahni himself.

‘Meditate there’ is the instruction to meditate on the centre of this ten-petalled lotus. Within the centre of the lotus exists the region of fire, which shines like the rising sun. It is represented by the triangular yantra, the symbol of fire, because fire is the *tattwa*, element or primary substance, of manipura.

Elements of the yantra

Outside this inverted red triangle we have the three swastika marks, one on each side of the triangle, which are like the letter ‘T’. A *swastika* has nothing to do with the symbol used by the Nazi regime. It is a mystical, symbolic image having (usually) four intersecting lines bent at right angles, representing the meeting of four paths as well as good luck and fortune. However, here the two lines that resemble the Roman uppercase ‘T’ are also considered one of the forms of swastika. Swastikas are found at the perimeters of *yantras*, the geometric or visual form of the chakras.

Within the triangular yantra lies the bija mantra ऀ (*Ram*) which rhymes with ‘sum’ and is not pronounced



Manipura chakra with bija
mantra and animal

like the male sheep. This is the bija or seed mantra and existing within the bija is Vahni himself, the deity of manipura. In the lower apex of the inverted triangle is a ram, a male sheep, symbolizing indomitable endurance and will. The ram symbolizes the consciousness of manipura. It is very strong, wilful, indomitable and robust, and in my dealings with one of them, extremely stubborn and selfish as well. My ram

was eating in the neighbour's yard and the neighbour came over and started yelling because my ram was eating his green grass. We tried to chase him back through the hole in the fence, but he just wouldn't go. We took him right to the hole, we pushed him into the hole, and he stopped there. Two of us tried pushing him into the hole, and they're not such big animals, but he just wouldn't budge. No, we had to pick him up and lift him over the fence and dump him on the other side and then close the hole. You have to superimpose your will over the strength and the stubbornness of the ram. This describes the behaviour of manipura consciousness.

Burning samskaras

As aspirants of yoga, we practise a kind of burning up of desire. Life in Satyananda Yoga ashrams is designed to burn up obstacles to spiritual life. There are many ashrams which have lost this tradition; aspirants expect to have certain things such as tasty food and reasonable comforts and they do not expect disciplines to be imposed on them in the form of duties and participation in activities. In Satyananda Yoga ashrams, an enormous amount of time and energy is put into mantra, so much energy into

karma yoga, selfless action performed with awareness, into classical yoga which includes asana and pranayama, and into activities such as satsang and kirtan, and none of those activities are self-oriented apart from the essential activities such as bathing and eating. Through this constant activity there is a burning up of our ordinary desires. Sankalpas and self-analysis alone do not calm the turbulence of a mind full of desire, but high energy selfless activity raises the level of energy and the fire of the sun burns impurities.

For some people the ashram disciplines are not too difficult, but for others, the disciplines are found to be quite challenging. Working within discipline breaks barriers and lifts the level of energy, transforming ordinary desire into higher desire. This is agni burning the samskaras by facing situations and selflessly working through them.

One of the highest sadhanas of agni is the panchagni sadhana, an extreme austerity of facing five fires. Sri Swamiji performed his panchagni sadhana over a nine year period.



Swami Satyananda performing
panchagni sadhana

We can only surmise that he had just the seeds and traces of desire remaining. Sage Patanjali's raja yoga describes asamprajnata samadhi as only the seeds and traces remaining. Even after Sri Swamiji's long period of selfless service, performing karma yoga with ceaseless energy and analysis, the seeds or the traces of desire remained. For further spiritual progress, these have to be burnt up. So he embarked on his panchagni sadhana, which should not be tried at home, for it needs divine guidance.

Sri Swamiji performed his panchagni sadhana in the hottest months: May, June, July and August, with all five fires during the final years: one at the front, one at the back, one on the left, one on the right, and the sun overhead. The first year, he had one fire. The second year, two fires; the third year, three; the fourth year, four; and by the fifth year he had four fires and the sun for a total of five fires, representing five pranas. At the end of the nine-year sadhana, I was lucky to be invited to visit him. Personally, I was worried when I saw Sri Swamiji. I thought, “He must have fried his brain.” He looked at me for two seconds and then he said, “I’m not sick.” He continued, “It is very difficult to explain, but before this sadhana, the fire was outside. Now there is just a small, steady flame, burning within.” He left me with that. I scratched my head for the rest of the visit, ‘What did he mean, what did he mean?’

In the meantime, I travelled to Munger and back to Rikhia, then here and there visiting sacred Indian sites and then back to Kolkata, where, in the middle of a restaurant, I got it! The enthusiasm that we have – for life, for fulfilling our desires, and for doing all the things that we need to do in life – that’s a kind of fire. Enthusiasm and desire is the fire beneath the energy that we have for accomplishing and acquiring all the external things. The reason why we get up in the morning, and the reason why we keep going, is desire; our desires fuel the external fire of enthusiasm. Sri Swamiji burnt these desires all up and was left with a small, steady flame within; no external desire remained. Later, he was giving satsang and he asked, “Can you imagine what it is like to be without desire, when all desires just fall away?” We can’t imagine life without desire.

9

Deities of the Lotus

Deva Vahni, also called Agni, is the shining red deva with four arms whose darshan appears in the fiery region. In manipura sadhana, Vahni is the first deity that we experience in manipura chakra.

Deva Vahni, embodiment of prana

The bija mantra of manipura is the Vahni bija or the agni bija ॠ (*Ram*). The mantra is red and lightning-like. In *Laya Yoga*, SS Goswami quotes from *Devi Bhagavatam* (11:8:5) saying, “The bija mantra ॠ (*Ram*), is red and lightning-like and is always surrounded by the five deities, five pranas, and three forms of power.” Thus, the five pranas: prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana, manifest from the bija mantra ॠ (*Ram*) and the five deities surround him. This experience is the result of concentration on ॠ (*Ram*).

Quoting from the *Garland of Letters* by Sir John Woodroffe and concerning the name Vahni: “Agni is called ‘Vaishvanara’, because it is present in Vishvanara and in all living beings as the heat of oxidization or combustion. In the name ‘Vahni’, the Sanskrit root *vah* means ‘offerings to the gods’ and the root *an* means ‘to be’, ‘all things’, and so forth.”

Therefore, from concentration on ॠ (*Ram*), Vahni appears, surrounded by deities and prana. Vahni is red, four-armed, and is the form of the deity in this bija mantra. Vahni

embodies all forms of heat and light energy concentrated as prana. In the *Mridanitantra* MS, Kalicharana cites a passage in which the dhyana form of Vahni is “Seated on a ram, a rudraksha rosary in one hand and a spear in the other.” He adds, “The other two hands are in the *mudra*, or gesture, of granting boons and dispelling fear.” We can visualize a handsome, four-armed, red Vahni seated on a ram. In one hand is a rudraksha mala, in another a spear and the other two hands are in the mudras of granting boons and dispelling fear.

The spear symbolizes Shakti, who represents all forms of energy and spiritual powers that develop God-Consciousness, and in another hand he holds a rudraksha mala. Vahni’s rudraksha mala or rosary represents the sutra of kundalini, meaning the aksharas in the spine from which the Sanskrit alphabet emerges. His two remaining hands are in the mudras of dispelling fear and granting boons.

Vahni gets his power from the sun. In the same way as the power of the sun gives light and energy to the whole solar system, the sun is the principle of manipura. The sun also controls the orbits of planets, from Mercury to Pluto and throughout the solar system. Every life form depends on the sun. Everything comes from the power of the sun and exists only by the enormous attraction to the sun. Life as we know it, and everything about our human existence, gets its power from manipura. Prana originates in manipura and prana shakti is distributed from manipura. Just as the sun is the centre of life and the existence of everything in the solar system, similarly, manipura is the centre of existence within the domain of the physical body and its subtle aspects.

Outside the triangle of fire are the three divine symbols, the three swastika marks, and within the triangle of fire is the bija. The bija of manipura is ॐ (*Ram*), the divine symbol for the chakra. As sadhakas, ॐ (*Ram*) is the beginning of the divine experience in the chakra, which is the bija of Vahni himself.

In the lower part of the apex of the triangle is a ram, symbolizing indomitable endurance and will, as previously mentioned. Ram, the animal, has the character of manipura which is strength, power and endurance. When we concentrate on रं (Ram), and as our concentration becomes deep, we have the experience of Vahni. Another name for Vahni is Agni Deva and appropriately enough, he is red, has four arms and the power of the sun. Vahni, with the power of the sun, can burn up desire, burn up the obstacles we have to further progress.

Symbology of the ram

Regarding *mesha*, or the ram, SS Goswami writes in *Laya Yoga*, “Mesha (the ram) is the basic power-in-concentration, which supports the central energy as fire (Vahni)-energy in the form of the bija mantra *Rang* (रं).” This could also be expressed as mesha representing the determination and will to continue concentration. This determined concentration holds the energy of fire or Vahni in the form of रं (Ram).

Goswami experienced four mantras by concentration on mesha. He has described in *Laya Yoga* his experience thus:

Mesha has four mantra-forms represented by Ang, Ring, Nang and Hang. The mesha form is essentially due to Nang, in which lies the energy of the sun and the divine energy of Shiva. The energy of creativity (as Brahma energy) and the reduction of energy to consciousness (as Vishnu energy) are mainly derived from Ang. The prana energy comes from Hang. An aspect of creative energy is released as great, sustainable sexual vigour. This vigour, however, also remains under control. The mesha process is the process of full development of the sexual vigour based on the fully energized body, to harness it through anti-ejaculatory control and to transform the desire into elements constituting concentration.

Regarding this transformation and utilization of sexual energy into concentrated energy, Goswami continues to say, “For the Rudra-consciousness-concentration, this process

is invaluable and it becomes most effective through the influence of *Ring*.”

Rudra, destroyer of creation

The *Sat Chakra Nirupanam* says (v. 20):

Meditate upon Him, Fire, seated upon a ram, four-armed and radiant like the rising sun. In His lap ever dwells Rudra, who is of a pure vermilion hue. Rudra is white with the ashes with which He is smeared; of an ancient aspect and three-eyed. His hands are placed in the attitude of granting boons and of dispelling fear. He is the destroyer of creation.

From meditation on the fire in the triangular region of manipura, Rudra, the well-known form of Shiva, is revealed. As we concentrate on the bindu of the bija mantra ॐ (*Ram*), Vahni appears. When we then concentrate on Vahni, which is ॐ (*Ram*), we have the experience of Lord Rudra.

Rudra is red, quite appropriately, yet he appears white because he is covered with white ash. When we saw Sri Swamiji during his panchagni sadhana, his skin had turned a glowing black; however, he was covered with ash at the time and so appeared white. He used to cover the body with ash and had many rudraksha malas around the panchagni area and himself at the time. His darshan was spectacular.

Symbology of the bull

Rudra emerges into consciousness seated on vrisha, his bull. Kalicharana noted, “Rudra should be concentrated on as seated on a bull.” Vrisha is known for his power, knowledge and steadfastness on the spiritual path. In yogic terms this is known as *veda*, knowledge; *dharma*, established on the spiritual path; and *virya*, strength to maintain this state. The qualities of vrisha can be equated to the astrological characteristics of Taurus, the bull: stubborn, steadfast and enormously strong.

Once kundalini has reached manipura, it is said that we have become established on the spiritual path. We have the

power and strength of vrisha to stay on the path and the knowledge of the path ahead, as mentioned in *Kundalini Tantra* by Swami Satyananda.

Lord of time

When taken out of context, the sentence, ‘Rudra is the destroyer of creation’ could lead one to believe that Rudra is a fearsome and alarming deity; however, this is not the case. The law of creation, meaning the law of anything that comes into being, is that everything is subject to time and when that time is complete, that thing is annihilated or destroyed. Another name for this aspect of Shiva is *Mahakala*, or ‘the great time’. Time is the destroyer of everything. Nothing is immortal except that which has always been and was never created. That which has always been and was never created is pure Consciousness. Scientists tell us that this universe was created some sixteen billion years ago, and their calculations show that after a few more billions of years it will be destroyed. The divine description of this destructive aspect in the cycle is Rudra.

Stephen William Hawking is an English theoretical physicist, cosmologist and author. His recent calculations, released to the press, predict that the universe will collapse after some billions of years and will subsequently be recreated. This cycle has been repeated many times in the past and will continue. Stephen Hawking’s calculations have tremendous implications, and they demonstrate how Lord Rudra and his destructive aspect fit into the upcoming demise of the universe.

Supported by modern physics, and putting a timeline on the creation and destruction of our universe, is the vedic concept of ‘yuga’. A *yuga* is a vast period of time, something between 450,000 to 840,000 years, which constitutes an age or aeon. There are four yugas, each having certain qualities or characteristics, which come about as the universe moves through phases of evolution and manifestation and involution or dissolution. From the yogic perspective, the concept of yuga explains the rise and fall of both advanced

civilizations and dark ages. It is believed that humanity is currently five thousand years into the Kali Yuga, a period of much turmoil, darkness and strife, which will continue with the help of Lord Rudra to dissolve until it is destroyed. Only with the destruction of this era can the next era dawn, that of Satya Yuga, the wonderful 'golden' era predominated by righteousness and truth.

Lord Rudra has also been experienced in the form of a *lingam*, an idol of Shiva which is usually a naturally formed oval stone. However, Rudra has a special lingam. In the *Bhutashuddhitantra* (2:2) it is said Rudra appears from manipura not riding upon a bull, but as a black, hexagonal lingam emerging from a black cloud lying within the triangular region of fire in manipura. This Shivalingam is called the Rudralingam. Thus Rudra has two aspects; he can either be the Lord Rudra, seated on a bull as noted by Kalicharana: "Rudra should be concentrated on as seated on a bull", or a Rudralingam, the hexagonal Shivalingam. According to Goswami's *Laya Yoga*, this lingam form has also been called *siddha*, endowed with great yogic power.

The presence of Rudra in the fire triangle is mentioned by the various tantras according to Goswami: *Kankamalini Tantra*, *Nirvana Tantra*, *Shiva Samhita*, *Rudrayamala*, *Mantramahodadhi*, *Sharadatilaka Tantra*, *Yogashikhopanishad*, and *Yogatattwopanishad*. However, as a point of interest, the presence of Lord Rudra has been found in the tantras and Upanishads both. Even though kundalini yoga is known as part of tantra, the experiences of Rudra have also been described in the vedic texts of the Upanishads and the Puranas.

Devi Lakini, the doorkeeper

Devi Lakini together with Rudra is considered particularly auspicious. As well as auspicious, she is also necessary, as she allows for further spiritual progress of the aspirant and for Ma Kundalini to proceed on to higher realms.

For meditation on Lakini we can again turn to *Sat Chakra Nirupanam* (v. 21):

Here abides Lakini, the benefactress of all. She is four-armed, of radiant body, with a complexion of *shyama*, dark or dark blue, clothed in yellow raiment and decked with various ornaments and exalted with the drinking of ambrosia. By meditating on this navel lotus, the power to destroy and create the world is acquired.

‘Decked with various ornaments’ means that she is decorated with gems and pearls arranged in varied and beautiful designs. ‘The drinking of ambrosia’ refers to the nectar that drops from sahasrara. Regarding Lakini dhyana, referenced elsewhere in *Sat Chakra Nirupanam* is the following description:

Let the excellent worshipper meditate upon the Devi Lakini, who is blue and has three faces and three eyes to each face, fierce of aspect and with her teeth protruding. In her two right hands she holds the thunderbolt and the spear and in the left hands she offers the gestures of dispelling fear and granting boons. She is in the pericarp of the navel lotus, which has ten petals. She is fond of meat and her breasts are ruddy with the blood and fat which drop from her mouth.

The references and commentaries regarding Lakini are numerous. Often it is the description of her colour that varies, from black to dark blue to golden or blood red. According to Sir John Woodroffe’s *Serpent Power*, there is a reference from *Alamkara Shastra* regarding the dark colour, or *shyama*, of Lakini: “Shyama is the name given to a woman who is warm in winter and cool in summer and has the lustre of molten gold.” In Goswami’s *Laya Yoga*, commentator Ramawallabha interprets shyama as the golden colour. In another colour reference, Goswami quotes Jaganmohana: “Lakini is of the colour of tapta-gold.” The word ‘tapta’ is vague, it may mean either heated or red-hot. Thus *tapta*-gold can mean red-hot gold, shining red, rather than golden-coloured. Kalicharana’s description of Lakini is quoted here:

Divine Lakini is nila, black or dark-blue, and has three faces, each having three eyes, with large teeth, and is powerful; she holds in her right hands a *vajra*, thunderbolt, and a *shakti* or spear. Her left hands are in the gestures of dispelling fear and granting boons.

This dhyana form is similar to what has been stated in the *Jamala*, quoted in the *Yogakalpalatika MS*. Even the wording is almost similar.

Other texts describe Lakini as being red in colour. In *Kankalamalimitantra*, her colour is vermilion-red, she is two-armed and shines with the vermilion mark on her forehead. Her face is as beautiful as the moon and her eyes are bright and painted beautifully with collyrium. She is clad in white raiment and adorned with various ornaments. In *Kularnava Tantra*, Lakini is described as having a pale red colour, holding a noose and a goad. She wears a garland of skulls and is adorned with various ornaments. *Gandharvatantra* describes Devi Lakini as the shakti of Rudra. Her colour is blood-red, she is three-eyed, has large teeth and is powerful. She assumes the attitudes of granting boons and of dispelling fear. Yet another tantra says, “Devi Lakini, the shakti of Rudra, is blood red in colour, has three eyes, large teeth, is powerful and yet she assumes the attitude of granting boons and dispelling fear.”

One could use the following form for concentration on Lakini: She is a shining black or dark blue colour; dressed in yellow raiment, adorned with various ornaments and is in deep concentration. She has three faces, each having three eyes, large teeth and is powerful. Within her right set of hands she has a lightning bolt and a spear, and with the left set of hands in the mudras of granting boons and dispelling fear, she is saying, “Don’t be afraid, I’m here.” The sadhaka must remember she is saying, “I’m here for your good.” Together with Lord Rudra, Shakti Lakini should be meditated upon. The importance of Lakini is stressed by one whole and final verse devoted to her by Swami Poornananda, which is significant because there are just four verses in total devoted to the subject of manipura.

The Sanskrit root *la* means, ‘that which takes or the remover of obstacles’. Lakini has been called the doorkeeper because concentration on her opens the path for kundalini shakti to rise. She is a part of kundalini shakti herself. Also, *Rudrayamala* states that concentration on Rudra with Lakini is necessary for the attainment of yoga. Her dark colour is that of *tamoguna*, having the quality of darkness, the destructive force. Lakini removes all ignorance, freeing her devotees from bondage.

Vision of Devi Lakini, Lord Rudra and Lord Vahni are divine experiences. They are very deep experiences that we may be lucky enough to have at some time. To be able to have darshan of the gods and goddesses in the chakras is a great blessing. Even a single darshan of a single god or goddess in one lifetime would be enough. Darshan is not just a picture or image coming to the mind, it is not just imagination and visualization. When we have the experience of the form of a god or goddess, it is not just two arms, four arms, three eyes, a spear and this and that, no, it is a complete experience. Darshan is a full experience, similar to that felt at a significant event such as meeting with the guru



Devi Lakini

or a revered teacher. When you leave their company, you have made a connection and taken in an impression that will be with you for the rest of your life. That is darshan. Such darshans bring about change and add a new quality to life. It is not like the imagery we create in the practice of yoga nidra, “See a church steeple, a rising sun, a saint in meditation.” That is visualization, not darshan. Darshan is different; it is an experience of the higher consciousness.

10

Awakening Manipura

How do we start awakening manipura, and what do we need to know? First we need to realize that it is possible to awaken manipura shakti before developing other balancing characteristics. If we haven't developed these softer human characteristics, or dealt with our vrittis from swadhisthana or mooladhara, then we suddenly find ourselves under the control of manipura with all its vrittis and qualities. If we have only awakened the shakti of manipura and not that of the other chakras, we will have only the selfish, dominant, stubborn, indomitable, aggressive qualities of the ram, and the only place such a person should be in is the boxing ring. A person with such qualities is a pure manipura person. Thus, we must ensure that we have a good platform from which to begin our practices of manipura awakening.

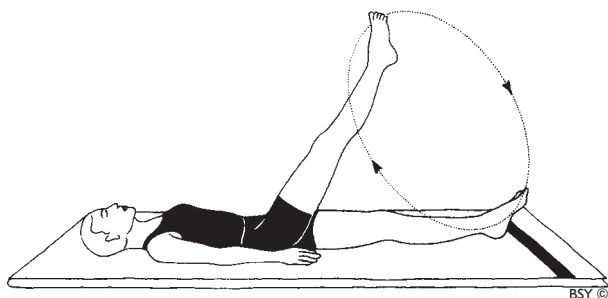
Diet: Tantric practices in general do not restrict any foods. Tantric practitioners can eat meat, fish and spices, but if manipura chakra is to be awakened, the diet must be very pure, sattvic, and at certain stages, fasting may be necessary. If manipura is awakened when the diet is faulty, harmful reactions may take place. As a result of manipura being the centre of the digestive fire, disorders of the gastrointestinal system can be corrected by manipura sadhana.

Asanas: Primarily, the physical energy must be increased to have the stamina required for our aspiration to awaken

and raise Ma Kundalini to manipura. To bring about an increase in our physical energy, we increase the supply of prana from manipura, and for this we can start with the Pawanmuktasana Part 2, digestive/abdominal group, from *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*. (For all asanas mentioned without detailed practice description in this section, refer to *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*.)

PAWANMUKTASANA SERIES PART 2 (DIGESTIVE/ABDOMINAL GROUP)

I. Padachakrasana (leg rotation)



Stage 1: Lie in the starting position and relax.

Raise the right leg 5 cm from the ground, keeping the knee straight.

Rotate the entire leg clockwise 10 times in as large a circle as comfortable.

The heel should not touch the floor at any time during the rotation.

Rotate 10 times anti-clockwise.

Repeat with the left leg, first clockwise, then anti-clockwise.

Do not strain.

Rest and practise abdominal breathing until respiration returns to normal.

Stage 2: This may be repeated raising both legs together, but do not strain. Be aware that this is a more strenuous form of the practice.

Keep the legs together and straight throughout the practice.

Rotate both legs clockwise and then anti-clockwise 3 to 5 times.

The circular movement should be as large as possible.

Breathing: Inhale while moving the leg(s) upwards.

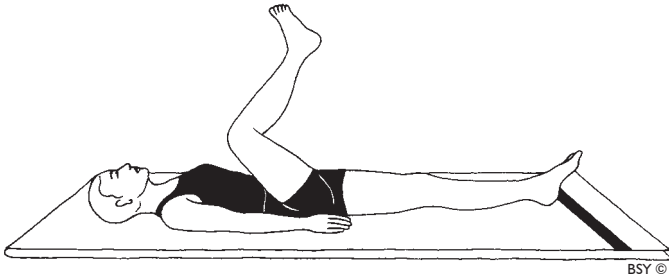
Exhale while lowering the leg(s).

Awareness: Upon the rotation of the leg(s), the effects of the asana on the hips and abdomen, and synchronizing the movements with the breath.

Contra-indications: Not to be performed by persons suffering from high blood pressure or serious back conditions such as sciatica and slipped disc.

Benefits: Good for the hip joints, obesity, toning of the abdominal and spinal muscles.

2. Pada Sanchalanasana (cycling)



Stage I: Lie in the starting position and relax.

Raise the right leg.

Bend the knee and bring the thigh to the chest.

Raise and straighten the leg completely. Then lower the straight leg in a forward movement.

Bend the knee and bring it back to the chest to complete the cycling movement.

The heel should not touch the floor during the movement.

Practise 10 times in a forward direction and then 10 times in reverse. Repeat with the left leg.

Breathing: Inhale while straightening the leg.

Exhale while bending the knee and bringing the thigh to the chest.

Stage 2: Raise both legs. Practise alternate cycling movements as though pedalling a bicycle.

Practise 10 times forward and then 10 times backward.

Breathing: Breathe normally throughout.

Stage 3: Raise both legs and keep them together throughout the practice.

Bring the knees as close as possible to the chest on the backward movement and straighten the legs fully on the forward movement. Slowly lower the legs together, keeping the knees straight, until the legs are just above the floor.

Then bend the knees and bring them back to the chest. Practise 3 to 5 forward cycling movements and the same in reverse.

Do not strain.

Breathing: Inhale while straightening the legs.

Exhale while bending the legs to the chest.

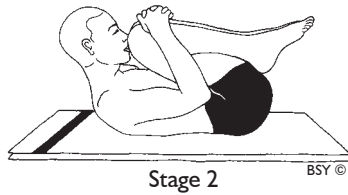
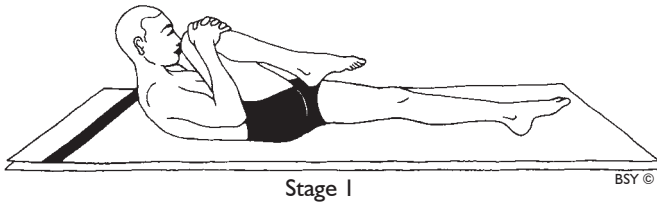
Awareness: On the smoothness of the movement and proper coordination, especially while reverse cycling. When relaxing, be aware of the abdomen, hip, thighs and lower back, and the breath.

Contra-indications: Not to be performed by persons suffering from high blood pressure or serious back conditions such as sciatica and slipped disc.

Benefits: Good for hip and knee joints. Strengthens abdominal and lower back muscles.

Practice note: Keep the rest of the body, including the head, flat on the floor throughout the practice. After completing each stage remain in the base position and relax until the respiration returns to normal. If cramping is experienced in the abdominal muscles, inhale deeply, gently pushing out the abdomen, and then relax the whole body with exhalation. Do not strain; this applies especially to stage 3, which is a more strenuous practice.

3. Supta Pawanmuktasana (leg lock posture)



Stage 1: Lie in the starting position and relax.

Bend the right knee and bring the thigh to the chest.

Interlock the fingers and clasp the hands on the shin just below the right knee.

Keep the left leg straight and on the ground.

Inhale deeply, filling the lungs as much as possible.

Exhaling, raise the head and shoulders off the ground and without straining, bring the right knee to the nose.

Remain in the final position for a few seconds.

While slowly inhaling, return to the base position.

Relax the body.

Begin by repeating 3 times with the right leg and 3 times with the left leg, gradually working up to 10 times with each leg.

Practice note: Ensure that the straight leg remains in contact with the ground.

It is important to start with the right leg because it presses the ascending colon directly.

Follow with the left leg which presses the descending colon directly.

Stage 2: Remain in the starting position.

Bend both knees and bring the thighs to the chest.

Interlock the fingers and clasp the hands on the shin bones just below the knees.

Inhale deeply.

Exhaling, raise the head and shoulders and try to place the nose in the space between the two knees.

Hold the raised position for a few seconds, counting mentally.

Slowly lower the head, shoulders and legs while inhaling.

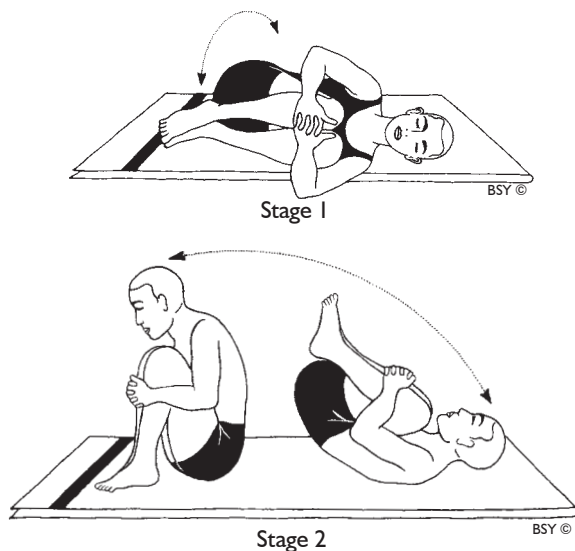
Practise by repeating 3 times, gradually working up to 10 times.

Awareness: On the movement, the abdominal pressure, and the breath.

Contra-indications: Not to be performed by persons suffering from high blood pressure or serious back conditions such as sciatica and slipped disc.

Benefits: Supta pawanmuktasana strengthens the lower back muscles and loosens the spinal vertebrae. It massages the abdomen and the digestive organs and is therefore very effective in removing wind and constipation. By massaging the pelvic muscles and reproductive organs, it is also useful for impotence, sterility and menstrual problems.

4. Jhulana Lurhakanasana (rocking and rolling)



Stage 1: Lie flat on the back. Bend both legs to the chest. Interlock the fingers of both hands and clasp them around the shins just below the knees. This is the starting position. Roll the body from side to side. Begin with 5 times, gradually working up to 10 times, touching the side of the legs on the floor.

Breathing: Exhale while rolling to one side. Inhale while returning to the centre. Exhale while rolling to the other side.

Stage 2: Sit in the squatting position with the buttocks just above the floor. Interlock the fingers of both hands and clasp them around the shins just below the knees. Rock the whole body backwards and forwards on the spine. Try to come up into the squatting pose on the feet when rocking forward. If it is difficult to perform with the

hands clasped on the shins, then hold the side of the thighs adjacent to the knees.

Begin practising with 5 backward and forward movements, gradually working up to 10.

Breathing: Inhale as you roll backwards.

Exhale as you come forward.

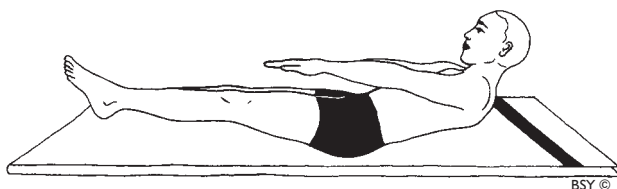
Awareness: On the coordination of movement.

Contra-indications: Not to be performed by persons with serious back conditions.

Benefits: This asana massages the back, buttocks and hips. It is most useful if done first thing in the morning after waking.

Practice note: Use a folded blanket for this practice so that there is no possibility of causing damage to the spine. While rocking back, the head should remain forward. Be careful not to hit the head on the floor.

5. Naukasana (boat pose)



Lie in the starting position.

Keep the eyes open throughout.

Breathe in deeply. Hold the breath and then raise the legs, arms, shoulders, head and trunk off the ground.

The shoulders and feet should be no more than 15 cm off the floor. Balance the body on the buttocks and keep the spine straight.

The arms should be held at the same level and in line with the toes. The hands should be open with the palms down. Look towards the toes.

Remain in the final position and retain the breath. Count to 5 mentally (or hold for longer if possible).

Note: The elevated position should be maintained until the abdominal muscles start to vibrate.

Return to the supine position and then breathe out.

Be careful not to injure the back of the head while returning to the floor.

Relax the whole body.

This is one round.

Begin with 3 rounds and as comfortable, work up to 5 rounds.

Relax in shavasana after each round, gently pushing out the abdomen with inhalation to relax the stomach muscles.

Variation: Repeat the same process as above, but clench the fists and tense the whole body as much as possible in the raised position.

Breathing: Inhale before raising the body.

Retain the breath, internal kumbhaka or retention of the breath inside the lungs, while raising, tensing and lowering the body.

Exhale in the supine position.

Awareness: Physical – on the movement, mental counting and tensing of the body (especially the abdominal muscles) in the final position, and the breath.

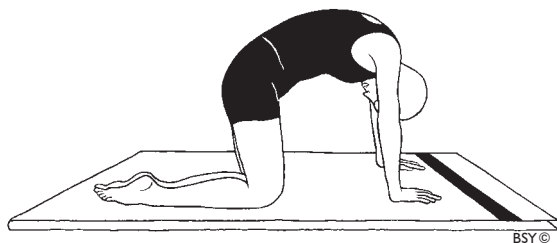
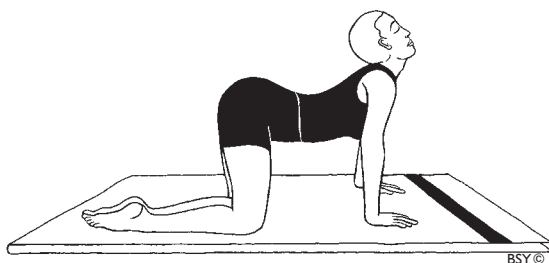
Spiritual – develops awareness of manipura.

Benefits: This asana stimulates the muscular, digestive, circulatory, nervous and hormonal systems, stimulates intestinal peristalsis, tones all the organs and removes lethargy. It is especially useful for eliminating nervous tension, relaxing the muscles and bringing about deep relaxation. It can be done at the end of the Pawanmuktasana series and may be performed before shavasana in order to attain a deeper state of relaxation. If practised upon waking, it immediately restores freshness. It is also useful for women preparing for childbearing and may be practised during the second trimester of pregnancy.

ADDITIONAL ASANA PRACTICES

The following asanas, though not a part of the Pawan-muktasana series, should also be practised. All can be found in *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha* (Yoga Publications Trust, Munger):

6. Marjari-asana (cat stretch pose)



Sit in vajrasana.

Raise the buttocks and stand on the knees.

Lean forward and place the hands flat on the floor beneath the shoulders with the fingers facing forward.

The hands should be in line with the knees; the arms and thighs should be perpendicular to the floor.

The knees may be slightly separated so they are well aligned under the hips.

This is the starting position.

Inhale while raising the head and depressing the spine so that the back becomes concave.

Expand the abdomen fully and fill the lungs with the maximum amount of air. Hold the breath for 3 seconds. Exhale while lowering the head and stretching the spine upward.

At the end of exhalation, contract the abdomen and pull in the buttocks.

The head will now be between the arms, facing the thighs.

Hold the breath for 3 seconds, accentuating the arch of the spine and the abdominal contraction.

This is one round.

Breathing: Perform the movement of breathing as slowly as is comfortable. Aim at taking at least 5 seconds for both inhalation and exhalation.

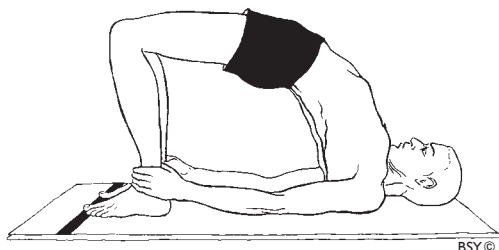
Duration: Perform 5 full rounds, gradually increasing to 10 full rounds for the purpose of awakening manipura.

Awareness: Physical – on the flexion of the spine from top to bottom, and on the breath synchronized with the movement. Spiritual – on swadhisthana chakra. This asana also establishes a sharp awareness of the manipura region.

Benefits: This asana improves the flexibility of the neck, shoulders and spine. It gently tones the female reproductive system, giving relief from menstrual cramps and leucorrhoea. It may be safely practised during pregnancy; forceful contraction of the abdomen, however, should be avoided.

Practice note: Do not bend the arms at the elbows. Keep the arms and thighs vertical throughout.

7. Kandharasana (shoulder pose)



Lie flat on the back.

Bend the knees, placing the soles of the feet flat on the floor with the heels touching the buttocks.

The feet and knees may be hip-width apart.

Grasp the ankles with the hands.

This is the starting position.

Raise the buttocks and arch the back upward.

Raise the chest and navel as high as possible without straining, pushing the chest up towards the chin and head, but without moving the position of the feet or shoulders.

Keep the feet flat on the floor.

In the final position, the body is supported by the head, neck, shoulders, arms and feet.

Hold the pose for as long as is comfortable and then lower the body to the starting position.

Release the ankles and relax with the legs outstretched.

Practise 5 to 10 rounds.

Breathing: Inhale deeply in the starting position.

Retain the breath inside while raising and holding the final position.

Alternatively, breathe slowly and deeply in the final position. Exhale while lowering to the starting position.

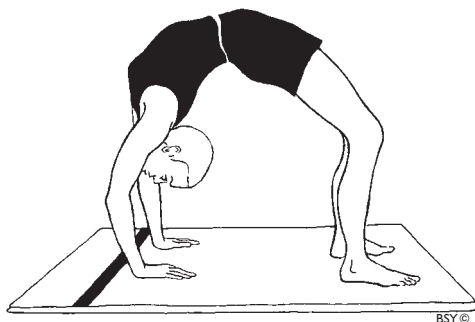
Awareness: Physical – on the movement, the abdominal region, thyroid gland or accentuation of flexion of the back. Spiritual – on vishuddhi, anahata and on manipura chakra.

Sequence: Perform before or after a forward bending asana. It is a good preparatory pose for chakrasana.

Contra-indications: People suffering from peptic or duodenal ulcers, or abdominal hernia should not practise kandharasana. It is generally recommended that women in the advanced stages of pregnancy not raise the buttocks more than 15 cm when practising this pose.

Benefits: This asana may be utilized to realign the spine, for eliminating rounded shoulders and relieving backache. It massages and stretches the colon and abdominal organs, improving digestion. It tones the female reproductive organs and is useful for women who have a tendency to miscarry, for the management of menstrual disorders, prolapse, asthma, and various bronchial and thyroid conditions.

8. Chakrasana (the wheel pose)



Lie on the back with the knees bent and the heels touching the buttocks.

The feet and knees should be about 30 cm apart.

Place the palms on the floor beside the head with the fingers pointing towards the shoulders.

This is the starting position.

Slowly raise the body and arch the back, allowing the crown of the head to support the weight of the upper body.

Move the hands in further towards the body for more support if necessary.

Straighten the arms and legs as much as possible without straining and lift the head and trunk from the floor.

Arch the back as high as is comfortable in the final position.

Straighten the knees further by moving the trunk towards the head.

Let the head hang between the straight arms.

Lift the heels and balance on the balls of the feet and the hands for a few seconds, and then lower the heels.

Hold the final position for as long as is comfortable.

Slowly lower the body so the head rests on the floor and then lower the rest of the body.

This is one round.

Breathing: Inhale in the starting position.

Retain the breath inside while raising the body.

Retain the breath inside or breathe normally in the final position. Exhale while lowering the body.

Duration: Hold for as long as is comfortable. Practise up to 3 rounds.

Awareness: Physical – on relaxing the spine in the final position and on the chest, abdomen and respiration.
Spiritual – on manipura chakra.

Sequence: Chakrasana should be practised only after mastery of preliminary and intermediate backward bending asanas.

It may be followed with forward bending asanas such as halasana and sarvangasana which apply a tight forward lock on the neck.

Contra-indications: Chakrasana should not be practised by people with any illness, weak wrists, weak back, during pregnancy or when feeling generally tired. The cautions for inverted postures apply.

Benefits: Chakrasana strengthens the legs. It is beneficial to the nervous, digestive, respiratory, cardiovascular and glandular systems. It influences all the hormonal

secretions and helps relieve various gynaecological disorders. It powerfully stretches and massages the abdominal organs in the manipura region.

Practice note: Chakrasana should preferably be practised on a soft carpet, which will protect the head. It should not be practised on a blanket, which may slip.

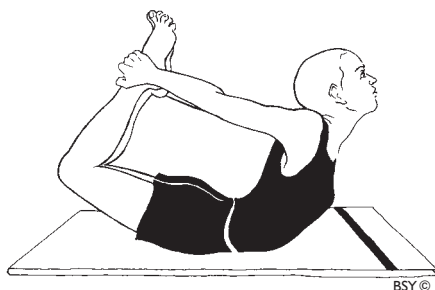
This is an inverted asana in which the whole body and nervous system are being placed in an abnormal position. It may be difficult to raise the body because the nervous system is not ready. Do not strain. Practise easier postures as preparation, such as setu asana. If the sense of position in space, or proprioception, is lost, strength is also lost. Chakrasana develops this sense of position in space.

Variation: You may also try raising first one leg and then the other in the final pose.

Variation: Poorna Chakrasana (full wheel pose)

Those people who are comfortable in chakrasana may extend the practice by carefully moving the hands towards the feet. In the final position, and only if the spine is extremely flexible, the hands grasp the feet, placing the elbows on the floor to form a complete wheel.

9. Dhanurasana (bow pose)



Lie flat on the stomach with the legs and feet together, and the arms and hands beside the body. Bend the knees and bring the heels close to the buttocks. Clasp the hands around the ankles.

Place the chin on the floor.

This is the starting position.

Tense the leg muscles and push the feet away from the body. Arch the back, lifting the thighs, chest and head together. Keep the arms straight.

In the final position the head is tilted back and the abdomen supports the entire body on the floor. The only muscular contraction is in the legs; the back and arms remain relaxed.

Hold the final position for as long as is comfortable and then, slowly relax the leg muscles and lower the legs, chest and head to the starting position.

Release the pose and relax in the prone position until the respiration returns to normal.

This is one round. Practise 3 or up to 5 rounds.

Breathing: Inhale deeply in the starting position.

Retain the breath while raising the body.

Retain the breath inside in the final position or practise slow, deep breathing so that the body rocks gently in unison with the breath.

Exhale while returning to the prone position.

Awareness: Physical – on the abdominal region, the back, or the rhythmic expansion and contraction of the abdomen to the slow, deep breathing. Spiritual – on manipura or ajna chakra.

Sequence: Dhanurasana is ideally practised after bhujangasana and shalabhasana and should be followed by a forward bending posture. It should not be practised until at least three or four hours after a meal.

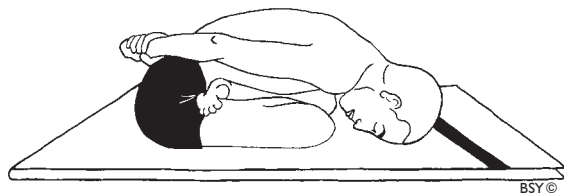
Contra-indications: People who suffer from a weak heart, high blood pressure, hernia, colitis, peptic or duodenal ulcers, should not attempt this practice. This asana should not be practised before sleep at night as it stimulates the adrenal glands and the sympathetic nervous system.

Benefits: The entire alimentary canal is reconditioned by this asana. The liver, abdominal organs and muscles are

massaged. The pancreas and adrenal glands are toned, balancing their secretions. The kidneys are massaged and excess weight is reduced around the abdominal area. This leads to improved functioning of the digestive, excretory and reproductive organs and helps to remove gastrointestinal disorders, dyspepsia, chronic constipation and sluggishness of the liver.

It is useful for the management of diabetes and menstrual disorders. It improves blood circulation generally. The spinal column is realigned and the ligaments, muscles and nerves are activated, removing stiffness. It helps to correct hunching of the upper back. It strengthens leg muscles, especially the thighs. Dhanurasana is useful for freeing nervous energy in the cervical and thoracic area, generally improving respiration.

10. Yogamudrasana (psychic union pose)



Sit in padmasana and close the eyes.

Relax the body for some time, breathing normally.

Hold one wrist behind the back with the other hand.

Inhale deeply.

While exhaling, bend forward, keeping the spine straight.

Bring the forehead to the floor or as close as is comfortable.

Relax the whole body in the final position, breathing slowly and deeply. Be aware of the pressure of the heels on the abdomen.

Stay in the final position for as long as is comfortable.

Do not strain the back, ankles, knees or thighs by forcing the body into the posture or staying in it for too long. Slowly return to the starting position. Repeat the pose with the legs crossed the other way around.

Breathing: Inhale slowly and deeply in the starting position. Exhale while bending forward. Breathe deeply and slowly in the final position. Inhale while returning to the starting pose.

Duration: Remain in the final position for one or two minutes if comfortable.

Awareness: Physical – on the back, abdomen or breathing. Spiritual – on manipura chakra.

Sequence: Ideally preceded or followed by a backward bending asana such as matsyasana (with the legs stretched out), ushtrasana or bhujangasana.

Contra-indications: People with serious eye, back or heart conditions, or with high blood pressure, and those in the early post-operative or post-delivery period should not attempt this asana.

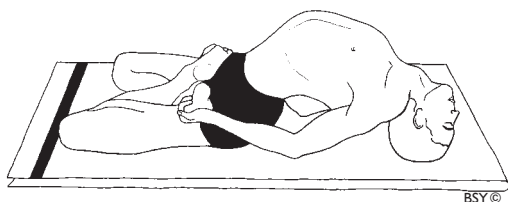
Benefits: This is an excellent asana for massaging the abdominal organs, removing constipation and indigestion. It stretches the back, freeing the spinal nerves which emerge from the spaces between the vertebrae, thus contributing to good general health. Yogamudrasana is used to awaken manipura chakra.

Variation: (for beginners)

This variation follows the same method as the basic technique except that instead of remaining in the final position, the body is raised and lowered a number of times.

It is particularly useful for those who are stiff and cannot touch the floor with their foreheads. Synchronize the movement with the breath.

11. Matsyasana (fish pose)



Sit in padmasana and relax the whole body.

Carefully bend backward, supporting the body with the arms and elbows. Lift the chest slightly, take the head back and lower the crown of the head to the floor.

Hold the big toes and rest the elbows on the floor.

Adjust the position of the head so that the maximum arch of the back is attained.

Relax the arms and the whole body, allowing the head, buttocks and legs to support the weight of the body.

Close the eyes and breathe slowly and deeply.

Return to the starting position, reversing the order of movements.

Repeat the asana, with the legs crossed the other way.

Breathing: Breathe deeply and slowly in the final position.

Duration: The final position may be held for up to 5 minutes, although 1 to 3 minutes is sufficient for general health.

Awareness: Physical – on the abdomen, chest, neck and head or breath. Spiritual – on manipura or anahata chakra.

Sequence: Halasana or sarvangasana are the ideal counter-poses as they stretch the neck in the opposite direction, releasing any muscular tension.

Contra-indications: People who suffer from heart disease, peptic ulcers, hernia, back conditions or any serious illness should not practise this asana. Pregnant women should also not attempt it.

Benefits: This asana stretches the intestines and abdominal organs and is useful for all abdominal ailments. To

remove constipation, drink 3 glasses of water and then perform this asana. It also relieves inflamed and bleeding piles. This practice is very good for asthma and bronchitis as it encourages deep respiration. It re-circulates stagnant blood in the back, alleviating backache. It regulates the function of the thyroid gland and stimulates the thymus gland, boosting the immune system.

The pelvic region is given a good stretch and the pressure of the feet on the thighs greatly reduces blood circulation in the legs, diverting it to the pelvic organs. Youthfulness and vitality are increased.

Practice note: It is important that the body is slowly lowered into and raised from the final position by using the elbows as a support. The movement should be performed with control and care as it is very easy to injure the spine.

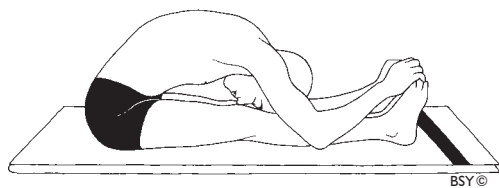
Variation I: This variation follows the basic technique except for the position of the hands.

Interlock the fingers of both hands. Place the hands behind the head and rest the back of the head in the open palms.

Note: The way of folding the legs in matsyasana resembles the tail of a fish, while the rest of the body represents its body and head.

Substitute: For the purpose of awakening manipura chakra, if matsyasana cannot comfortably be performed, Supta Vajrasana, sleeping thunderbolt pose, is an appropriate substitute.

12. Paschimottanasana (back stretching pose)



Sit on the floor with the legs outstretched, feet together and hands on the knees.

This is the starting position.

Relax the whole body.

Slowly bend forward from the hips, sliding the hands down the legs. Try to grasp the big toes with the fingers and thumbs. If this is impossible, hold the heels, ankles or any part of the legs that can be reached comfortably. Move slowly without forcing or jerking.

Hold the position for a few seconds. Relax the back and leg muscles, allowing them to gently stretch.

Keeping the legs straight and utilizing the arm muscles, not the back muscles, begin to bend the elbows and gently bring the trunk down towards the legs, maintaining a firm grip on the toes, feet or legs.

Try to touch the knees with the forehead. Do not strain. This is the final position.

Hold the position for as long as is comfortable and relax. Slowly return to the starting position.

This is one round.

Breathing: Inhale in the starting position.

Exhale slowly while bending forward.

Inhale in the static position.

Exhale while bringing the trunk further towards the legs with the arms.

Breathe slowly and deeply in the final position or retain the breath out if holding for a short duration.

Inhale while returning to the starting position.

Duration: Beginners should perform up to 5 rounds, staying in the final position for only a short length of time. Adept may maintain the final position for up to 5 minutes or with complete relaxation, for extended lengths of time.

Awareness: Physical – on the abdomen, relaxation of the back and leg muscles, or the slow breathing process. Spiritual – on swadhisthana and manipura chakra.

Sequence: This asana should precede or follow backward bending asanas such as setu asana, chakrasana, bhujangasana or matsyasana.

Contra-indications: People who suffer from slipped disc, sciatica or hernia should not practise paschimottanasana.

Benefits: This asana stretches the hamstring muscles and increases flexibility in the hip joints. It tones and massages the entire abdominal and pelvic region, including the liver, pancreas, spleen, uro-genital system, adrenal glands and kidneys. It helps to remove excess weight, stimulates circulation and encourages a good flow of fresh blood to the nerves and muscles of the spine. It is a powerful technique to awaken awareness of manipura and for spiritual awakening, and is highly regarded in ancient yoga texts.

Practice note: Paschimottanasana can also be commenced by inhaling and raising the arms in the starting position, and then exhaling into the forward bend, instead of sliding the hands down the legs.

SHATKARMA, BANDHA, PRANAYAMA, KRIYA

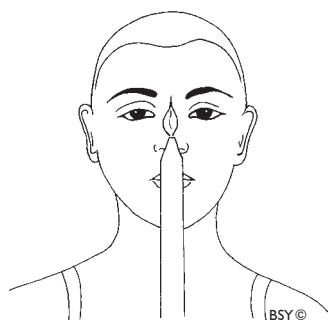
Basic practices are described here; however, for more complete instructions refer to *Meditations from the Tantras*.

I. Trataka (concentrated gazing)

Hatha yoga states that manipura is directly connected with the eyes. Just as the vision of an idea is a preview of the action we decide upon, in the same way ajna chakra and manipura chakra are very closely related to one another. In *Kundalini Tantra*, Swami Satyananda describes the relationship between manipura and ajna chakras as being similar to the way vision and wilful action are interdependent processes. Therefore, the practice of trataka brings about both manipura and ajna chakra awakening.

The word *trataka* means 'to gaze steadily', therefore the practice of trataka develops the power of concentration. The power of the mind is great, but due to desires and energy-wasting pastimes, this energy is dissipated in all directions. These dissipations of the mind are the blockages to successful action. When awakened, manipura provides the will, but an awakened will without clarity of vision leads to frustration and failure in the intended action, and any positive outcome is simply good luck.

If we can apply this widely distributed and dissipated mental power to one purpose, either spiritual or worldly, we cannot fail to succeed. Without one-pointedness of purpose, we are continually subjected to a bombardment of sensory data. Under this constant bombardment of stimuli, we cannot be aware of the multitude of thoughts that are passing through the mind. It is only when we relax and partially cut off the sense awareness that we become conscious of all this mental activity. We can pick and choose our thoughts at this point, disregarding the useless ones and picking up the thread of the productive ones, following them through to successful fulfilment of our purpose.



Technique

Light a candle and place it on a small table so that the flame is exactly at eye level when you are sitting.

Trim the wick and protect the flame from draughts so that it remains steady.

Sit in any comfortable meditation asana with the head and spine erect.

Adjust the position so that the candle is an arm's length away from the body.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body, especially the eyes. Be aware of body steadiness for a few minutes. Keep the body absolutely still throughout the practice.

Open the eyes and gaze steadily at the flame.

Try not to blink or move the eyeballs in any way.

Do not strain as this will cause tension and the eyes will flicker.

The awareness should be so completely centred on the flame that body awareness is lost.

If the mind begins to wander, gently bring it back to the practice.

After a minute or two, when the eyes become tired or begin to water, close them gently.

Gaze at the after-image of the flame in the space in front of the closed eyes. If the image moves up or down, or from side to side, observe it and try to stabilize it.

When the image of the flame begins to fade, try to bring it back.

When the image can no longer be retained, gently open the eyes and gaze at the flame once more.

Repeat the procedure for external gazing.

Close the eyes once more and gaze at the inner image.

Continue in this way 3 or 4 times.

After completing the final round, practise the technique of palming 2 or 3 times, before opening the eyes.

This completes the practice.

Time of practice: Trataka may be performed at any time, but the best time is at dawn or dusk when the stomach is empty.

Duration: Beginners should gaze for 1 or 2 minutes only, and then close the eyes. For general purposes 5 to 10 minutes is sufficient. For spiritual purposes, trataka may be performed for extended periods of time under the guidance of a competent teacher. Those who suffer from insomnia and mental tension should perform this practice for 10 to 15 minutes before sleeping at night.

Sequence: Trataka should be performed after asanas, pranayamas, mudras and bandhas to steady the body and mind.

Precautions: In the case of eye ailments, such as eyestrain, astigmatism and even the early symptoms of cataract; see the alternative practices in *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*.

People with myopia (short-sightedness) severe enough to warrant glasses should retain their glasses while practising trataka on a flame.

Contra-indications: People suffering from glaucoma should not practise trataka.

Epileptics should not practise trataka on a candle flame; see the alternative practices in *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*.

Avoid practising trataka on the sun, as the delicate membranes of the eyes may be damaged.

Benefits: This practice makes the eyes clear and bright. It balances the nervous system, relieving nervous tension.

It improves the memory and helps to develop good concentration and strong willpower. It activates manipura and ajna chakra and is an excellent preparation for meditation.

Practice note: When trataka is practised on a steady flame, there should be no draught in the vicinity. The practitioner should always avoid undue strain. The ability to keep the eyes open without blinking should be developed gradually with consistent practice.

Trataka is an excellent method for clearing accumulated complexes, problems and suppressed thoughts from the mind, enabling the practitioner to witness what is surfacing. However, it is also possible for these problems to manifest too rapidly, which may be mentally disturbing. If this occurs, stop the practice and seek advice from a competent teacher.

Trataka focuses the mind and curbs oscillating tendencies, making it one-pointed and awakening inner vision. All the attention and power of the mind is channelled into one continuous stream. Once this has been achieved, the latent potential within the mind is able to arise spontaneously.

Alternative practices: In the case of eye ailments, such as eyestrain, astigmatism and even the early symptoms of cataract, a black dot should be used, instead of gazing at a candle flame. Practise in daylight or with steady background lighting.

Epileptics should not practise trataka on a candle flame, but should choose a black dot or some other completely steady object to gaze at, with steady background light.

Variations: Trataka may be practised on any object of personal choice; however, it is not advisable to do trataka on the moon, a crystal ball, a mirror or darkness, as the experience may be too powerful to handle. Once the object has been chosen it should not be changed, otherwise the mind will have to start from the beginning again to assimilate the new object, therefore choose carefully and stick to the choice.

Note: *The word trataka means ‘to look’ or ‘to gaze’. Trataka is the last of the shatkarmas. It acts as a stepping-stone between physically-oriented practices and the mental practices which lead to higher states of awareness. It also forms a bridge between hatha yoga and raja yoga. Traditionally, it is a part of hatha yoga, but it may also be considered a part of raja yoga.*

2. Manipura Purification

Assume a comfortable sitting pose.

Hold the back straight and keep the eyes closed.

Breathe slowly and deeply, feeling the expansion and contraction of the navel as you imagine breathing in and out through the navel.

Feel the breath expanding and contracting in the navel area for a few minutes.

As the navel expands outward, feel that the breath is being pulled in through the navel, straight back to manipura in the spine.

As the navel contracts inward, feel that the breath is flowing from manipura chakra in the spine, to the navel and out of the body.

Practise this for a few minutes each day while mentally repeating, ‘Manipura, manipura, manipura’.

3. Swana Pranayama (panting breath), preparatory practice for agnisara kriya

Sit in bhadrasana or vajrasana, keeping the big toes in contact with each other. Place the hands on the knees and close the eyes.

Relax the whole body for a few minutes, especially the abdomen.

Straighten the arms and lean forward slightly.

Keep the head erect.

Open the mouth wide and extend the tongue outside.

Breathe in a panting manner through the mouth, with the tongue extended.

Contract and expand the abdomen rapidly.

While contracting the abdomen, breathe out and while expanding the abdomen, breathe in.

The breathing should be passive, only occurring because the movement of the abdomen is being accentuated. It should resemble the panting of a dog.

Keep the chest as still as possible. Do not strain.

Breathe in and out 10 to 20 times; up to 25 times if comfortable, for awakening manipura. This is one round. Practise 3 rounds.

Relax and breathe normally between rounds.

Awareness: Physical – on synchronizing the breath rhythmically with the abdominal movement. Spiritual – on manipura chakra.

Practice note: This kriya is an excellent practice to strengthen and develop control over the abdominal muscles and the diaphragm. It is also used as a preparatory practice for uddiyana bandha and nauli.

Note: *The words agni and vahni both mean 'fire'; sara means 'essence', and kriya means 'action'. The essence or nature of fire is attributed to the digestive process. If the abdominal organs are not working properly, the digestive fire smoulders and needs to be stoked or fanned to increase its power. Agnisara kriya does just that, as well as purifying the digestive system and its associated organs, and allowing the optimum assimilation of nutrients from food ingested.*

4. Agnisara Kriya or Vahnisara Dhauti (activating the digestive fire or cleansing with the essence of fire)



Sit in bhadrasana or vajrasana with the big toes touching, or in padmasana.

Inhale deeply.

Exhale, emptying the lungs as much as possible.

Lean forward slightly, straightening the elbows.

Push down on the knees with the hands and perform jalandhara bandha.

Contract and expand the abdominal muscles rapidly for as long as it is possible to hold the breath outside comfortably.

Do not strain.

Release jalandhara bandha.

When the head is upright, take a slow, deep breath in.

This is one round.

Relax until the breathing normalizes before commencing the next round.

Duration: Beginners may find this practice difficult and quickly become tired due to lack of voluntary control over the abdominal muscles. The muscles must be slowly and gradually developed over a period of time.

Three rounds of 10 abdominal contractions and expansions is sufficient at first. With regular practice, up to 50 abdominal movements may be performed with each round.

The time of breath retention should be gradually increased over a period of time.

Awareness: Physical – on the abdominal movement.
Spiritual – on manipura chakra.

Sequence: Practise after asanas. Agnisara kriya should be practised on an empty stomach, preferably in the early morning before breakfast, and ideally after the bowels have been emptied.

Precautions: During summer months, this practice should be performed with care as it may raise the body heat and blood pressure excessively. During this period, it should always be followed by a cooling pranayama such as sheetkari or sheetali.

Contra-indications: People suffering from high blood pressure, heart disease, acute duodenal or peptic ulcers, overactive thyroid gland or chronic diarrhoea should not perform this kriya.

Women who are pregnant should refrain from this practice.

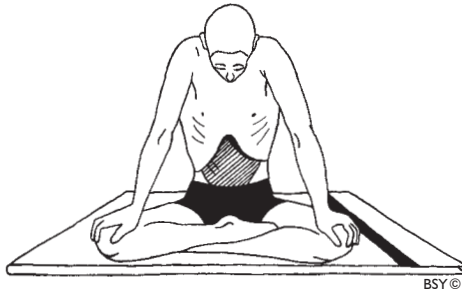
Benefits: Agnisara kriya stimulates the appetite and improves the digestion. It massages the abdomen, strengthens the abdominal muscles and encourages optimum health of the abdominal organs. Agnisara kriya stimulates the five pranas, especially samana, and raises the energy levels markedly. It alleviates depression, dullness and lethargy.

Uddiyana Bandha (abdominal contraction) and Nauli Kriya (abdominal massaging)

Recognized as major constituents of manipura sadhana are the practices of uddiyana bandha and nauli kriya. *Uddiyana bandha* is the contraction of the abdomen and the control of the muscles of the abdominal wall, as well as control over the small and large intestines and the other digestive and visceral organs. The functions of the liver, gallbladder, spleen, pancreas and stomach are brought into harmonious and controlled interaction when uddiyana bandha is perfected. However, agnisara kriya must be mastered before uddiyana is attempted.

Nauli kriya is the control of the rectus abdomini muscles and churning of the whole abdomen. This is a difficult practice which takes some time to perfect. However, with mastery of nauli it is easy to create a union of prana and apana in the navel so that manipura chakra can be awakened. Nauli may be difficult for many people; do not strain or overexert yourself. It is best not to attempt it until you have mastered agnisara kriya and uddiyana bandha.

5. Uddiyana Bandha (abdominal contraction)



Sit in siddha/siddha yoni asana or padmasana with the spine erect and the knees in contact with the floor. If this is not possible, uddiyana bandha can be performed while standing. (See 'Standing Abdominal Contraction' in *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*.)

Place the palms of the hands flat on the knees.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Inhale deeply through the nostrils.

Exhale fully.

Hold the breath outside.

Lean forward and press down on the knees with the palms of the hands. Straighten the elbows and raise the shoulders, allowing further extension of the spinal cord. Practise jalandhara bandha, pressing the chin against the chest.

Contract the abdominal muscles inward and upward.

Hold the abdominal lock and the breath outside for as long as you can without straining.

Concentrate on manipura chakra in the spine and repeat mentally: 'manipura, manipura, manipura'.

Then release the abdominal lock, bend the elbows and lower the shoulders.

Raise the head and then slowly inhale.

Remain in this position until the respiration returns to normal, and then begin the next round.

Breathing: Uddiyana bandha is performed with external breath retention only.

Duration: Practise 3 rounds in the beginning and gradually increase to 10 rounds over a few months as the system becomes accustomed to the practice.

Awareness: Physical – on the abdomen and breath. Spiritual – on manipura chakra.

Sequence: Uddiyana bandha is easier to perform if preceded by an inverted asana. It is ideally performed in conjunction with mudras, bandhas and pranayamas. If practised on its own, it should be performed after asanas and pranayamas and before meditation.

Precaution: Uddiyana bandha is an advanced technique and should be attempted only under the guidance of a competent teacher. It should be practised after attaining proficiency in external breath retention, and jalandhara and moola bandhas.

Contra-indications: Persons suffering from colitis, stomach or intestinal ulcer, diaphragmatic hernia, major abdominal problems, high blood pressure, heart disease, glaucoma and raised intracranial pressure should not perform this practice. It should also be avoided during pregnancy.

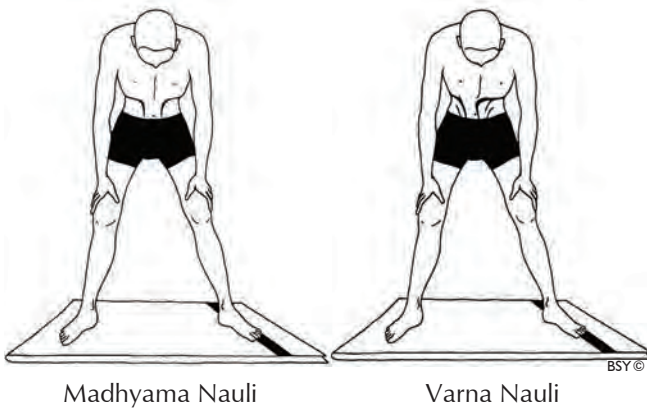
Benefits: Uddiyana bandha is a panacea for the abdomen. It stimulates the function of the pancreas and liver and strengthens the internal organs. The digestive fire is stimulated and the abdominal organs are massaged and toned. The adrenal glands are balanced, removing lethargy and soothing anxiety and tension. It improves blood circulation throughout the torso.

Uddiyana bandha stimulates the solar plexus, which has many subtle influences on the distribution of energy throughout the body. It creates a suction pressure which reverses the energy flow of apana and prana, uniting them with samana and stimulating manipura chakra.

Practice note: Uddiyana bandha must be practised on an empty stomach. The bowels should also be empty. Agnisara kriya is an excellent preparatory practice.

Note: *The Sanskrit word uddiyana means 'to rise up' or 'to fly upward'. This practice is so called because the physical lock applied to the body causes the diaphragm to rise towards the chest. Uddiyana is therefore often translated as 'the stomach lift'. Another meaning is that the physical lock helps to direct prana into sushumna nadi so that it flows upward to sahasrara chakra.*

6.Nauli (abdominal massaging)



Stage I: Madhyama Nauli (central abdominal contraction)

Stand with the feet about a metre apart.

Take a deep breath in through the nose and then exhale through the mouth, emptying the lungs as much as possible.

Bend the knees slightly and lean forward, placing the palms on the thighs just above the knees; the fingers may point either inward or outward.

The weight of the upper body should rest comfortably on this area above the knees. The arms should remain straight.

Perform jalandhara bandha while retaining the breath outside in *bahir kumbhaka*, external breath retention.

Keep the eyes open and watch the abdomen.

Suck in the lower abdomen.

Contract the rectus abdomini muscles so that they form a central arch running vertically in front of the abdomen. Hold the contraction for as long as it is comfortable to hold the breath.

Release the contraction, raise the head and return to the upright position. Inhale slowly and deeply, allowing the abdomen to expand.

This is one round.

Relax in the standing position until the heartbeat returns to normal. Repeat the practice.

Madhyama nauli should be perfected before proceeding to the next stage.

Stage 2: Varna Nauli (left isolation)

Follow the instructions for madhyama nauli to the point where the lower abdomen is contracted and the rectus abdomini muscles form a central, vertical arch down the abdomen.

Isolate the rectus abdomini muscles at the left side.

Contract the muscles to the left side as strongly as possible without straining.

Return to madhyama nauli.

Release the abdominal contraction; raise the head and return to the upright position.

Inhale slowly and deeply, allowing the abdomen to expand.

This is one round.

Relax in the upright position until the heartbeat returns to normal. Proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3: Dakshina Nauli (right isolation)

After completing varna nauli, practise in the same way, but on the right side.

Follow the instructions for madhyama nauli to the point where the lower abdomen is contracted and the rectus abdomini muscles form a central, vertical arch down the abdomen.

Isolate the rectus abdomini muscles at the right side.

Contract the muscles to the right side as strongly as possible without straining.

Return to madhyama nauli.

Release the abdominal contraction, raise the head and return to the upright position.

Inhale slowly and deeply, allowing the abdomen to expand.

This is one round.

Relax in the upright position until the heartbeat returns to normal.

Proceed to abdominal rotation or churning only after perfecting this practice.

Stage 4: Abdominal rotation or churning

This practice should not be attempted until the previous three stages have been mastered.

Practise varna nauli on the left side, then rotate the muscles to the right, dakshina nauli, and back to the left, varna nauli.

Continue rotating the muscles from side to side. This process is known as churning.

Start by practising 3 consecutive rotations, and then release the abdominal contraction.

Next start with dakshina nauli first, this time rotating the muscles from right to left, then left to right, 3 times consecutively.

Finally, perform madhyama nauli, isolating the muscles at the centre.

Raise the head and return to the upright position.

Inhale slowly and deeply, allowing the abdomen to expand.

This is one round.

Relax in the upright position until the heartbeat returns to normal.

Time of practice: Nauli should be practised only when the stomach is completely empty, at least 5 to 6 hours after meals. The best time to practise is early in the morning before any food or drink is taken.

Duration: Start with 5 rounds of madhyama nauli and work up to 10. Vama and dakshina nauli should be performed together: 5 to 10 rounds each.

Start abdominal churning with 5 to 10 rotations and slowly increase to 25 rotations over a period of months as more control is gained over the muscles. Do not strain.

Precautions: Nauli should only be practised under the guidance of a competent teacher. If any pain is felt in the abdomen during nauli, stop the practice immediately. Try again the following day with more awareness and less force.

Contra-indications: Nauli should not be attempted by people suffering from heart disease, hypertension, hernia, high blood pressure, abdominal pain, gallstones, acute peptic ulcer, constipation, or those who are recovering from surgery, especially abdominal surgery. Pregnant women should not practise nauli. However, six months after a normal childbirth the practice can help strengthen the abdominal and pelvic muscles.

Benefits: Nauli massages and tones the entire abdominal area, including the muscles, nerves, intestines, and the reproductive, urinary and excretory organs. It generates heat in the body and stimulates appetite, digestion, assimilation, absorption and excretion. It helps to balance the adrenal component of the endocrine system. Nauli stimulates and purifies manipura chakra, the storehouse of prana. It helps to increase mental clarity and power by harmonizing the energy flows in the body.

Practice note: Madhyama nauli should be perfected before proceeding to vama or dakshina nauli.

Before attempting, nauli the practices of agnisara kriya and uddiyana bandha should be mastered.

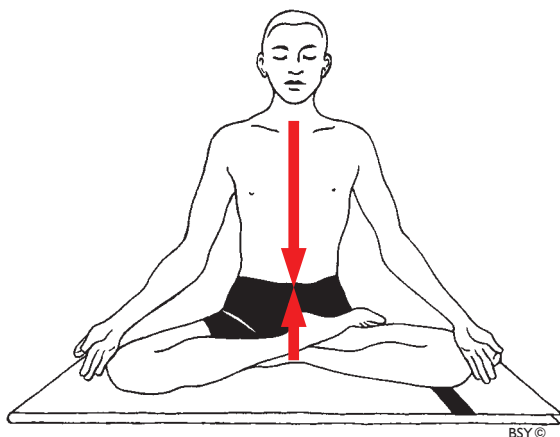
When nauli has been perfected in the standing position, it may be done in siddha/siddha yoni asana.

Note: *The word nauli comes from the root nala or nela, which means a 'reed' or 'hollow stalk' and refers to a tubular vessel, vein or nerve of the body. The word nala is the Sanskrit term for the rectus abdomini muscles. Nauli is also known as lauliki karma.*

7. Union of Prana and Apana

In this context, the word 'prana' is not referring to the cosmic prana; it refers to just one of the five major flows of this cosmic force that energizes the human body. Each one of the *pancha pranas* or five pranas (prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana) governs a specific part of the body and its associated organs. Here *prana* means the energy that governs the area between the navel and the throat and all the organs in this region. *Apana* is the name given to the energy governing the area from the navel to the perineum and the lower abdominal organs.

The prana at manipura chakra is awakened when the two opposing forces of prana and apana merge at samana. Prana is normally an upward moving force and apana is normally a downward moving force. However, they can be controlled and directed through tantric and yogic practices. The technique given here utilizes breath, concentration and visualization. It must be practised repeatedly so it can be perfected. The union of prana and apana comes with an experience of light and a kind of explosion in manipura. At this time, you feel that there is a change and kundalini shakti ascends and sits in manipura and there is pleasure and happiness. With this practice it is possible to reposition the seat of kundalini so she comes to reside in manipura.



Technique

Sit or lie down, ensuring that you are completely comfortable, and relax the whole body.

Internalize the consciousness and observe the body from within, developing awareness of the body in the form of space.

Become aware of apana, the energy moving in the lower abdomen from the navel to the perineum. Experience apana as waves of light energy moving downward.

Synchronize this movement of pranic light with the breathing process.

At the time of inhalation, see the light travelling downward from the navel to the perineum.

At the time of exhalation, reverse the flow of energy and send it back upward to the navel.

Become aware of prana, the movement of energy in the chest region from the diaphragm to the throat. Experience it as waves of prana moving upward and filling the whole chest with light.

Begin to synchronize the rhythm of the natural breath with the movement of this energy.

As you inhale, follow the upward movement of the prana from the diaphragm to the throat.

During exhalation, reverse the flow and send it downward, from the throat to the navel.

Become aware of both the movement of prana and apana together with the breath.

Each time you inhale prana moves upward and apana moves downward. Visualize and feel these two forces moving away from each other during inhalation.

At the time of exhalation both pranic flows are reversed: prana moves downward from the throat to the navel and apana moves upward from the perineum to the navel.

See and feel these two forces coming together and meeting at the navel on the exhalation, and see and feel them move apart on the inhalation.

Now begin to feel a strong and powerful impact as these two energies collide.

Each time prana and apana meet at the navel centre feel heat and light building up at the solar plexus, the centre of prana.

Practise for up to 27 breaths.

To end the practice, allow the awareness of the pranas to slowly dissipate, and externalize the awareness.

Practice note: To familiarize with and attain greater control of the movement of prana and apana, one may practise directing these forces in several different ways. The breath may also be utilized in different ways. One may achieve the merger of the two forces on the inhalation (instead of exhalation as in the above practice) and experience them moving away from each other on the exhalation. One may experience them as moving in tandem in the same direction (for instance, both moving downwards on the inhalation and upwards on the exhalation) and then reverse the flow of one of them to create the fusion. However, it is advised that at the beginning one follows one practice for a length of time to attain mastery.

CONCENTRATION AND VISUALIZATION

Concentration on Aksharas and Petals

Once steadiness of the body and the breath has been achieved with the previous techniques, one can begin to steady the mind through the practices of concentration and visualization. Over time, the symbolism of manipura will slowly reveal itself, and if fortunate, one can experience the darshan of the deities themselves.

One of the concentration practices for manipura chakra is japa with concentration on the mantras on the petals.

डं (*Dam*) ढं (*Dham*) णं (*Nam*) तं (*Tam*) थं (*Tham*) दं (*Dam*) धं (*Dham*) नं (*Nam*) पं (*Pam*) फं (*Pham*).

Go on repeating these individual mantras until all mantras become one continuous mantra with ten *aksharas*, letters, in it.

With practice, the individual aksharas amalgamate. This can be achieved by first memorizing them, then repeating them again and again until it becomes second nature, to the point of becoming a substratum of your conscious state. During the dream and waking states the mantra continues by itself as if it were one word with ten aksharas. Continue to visualize the ten-petalled lotus with the aksharas. With practices, the vision of the lotus petals will be transformed into a black, unbroken, circular ring.

Tejas Mahabhuta with Yantra Concentration

This is concentration on the fire element or *agni tattwa*. By placing the idea 'red triangle' in the mind, eventually a red triangle having the bija ॠ in the centre is experienced. Consciousness assumes the form of the red triangle with ॠ inside it until deep concentration reveals a sharp, clear vision of the red triangle and ॠ. By continued concentration on the red triangle, at some point the red triangle disappears and only a red ॠ remains.

Vahni Darshan

This is another concentration practice to try. From deep concentration on ॠ (*Ram*), the deity Vahni emerges. Vahni is red, is holding a rudraksha mala and a spear and is seated on mesha, the ram.

Referring back to the description of Lord Vahni in *Sat Chakra Nirupanam* (v. 20) described earlier, we have this instruction:

Meditate upon him (fire), seated on a ram, four-armed and radiant like the rising sun. In his lap ever dwells Rudra, who is of a pure vermilion hue. Rudra is white due to the ashes with which he is smeared. He is of an ancient aspect and three-eyed. His hands are placed in the attitude of granting boons and of dispelling fear. He is the destroyer of creation.

Vahni is seated on mesha, the ram, his vehicle. Mesha is also the animal symbol for Aries in western and vedic astrology both. Male fertility, aggression and courage are sources of energy for manipura, the energy, the source of prana for life, the character of the ram. By concentration on the ram, we can discover the source of prana, awaken our willpower and become indomitable. 'Indomitable' here means we won't be defeated by our own negativity.

Rudra Darshan

Through extended pranayama practice and meditation on Vahni, we become qualified and able to have darshan of Lord Rudra. The vibrational energy required for this experience is high and is the result of dedicated and continued practice morning and night for several months so we are prepared.

Concentration is performed on the bindu of ॠ. Rudra emerges into consciousness seated on vrisha, his bull. Kalicharana noted, "Rudra should be concentrated on as seated on a bull." Once kundalini has reached manipura, it is said that we have become established on the spiritual path. We have the power and strength of vrisha to stay on the path and the knowledge of the path ahead, as mentioned in *Kundalini Tantra* by Swami Satyananda.

Rudra is a form of Shiva and with this form, Rudra is entrusted with the work of destruction. The Sanskrit word 'rudra' is derived from the root *rud* meaning tears or weeping. Rudra is the spiritual aspect causing us to destroy all egotistic barriers with an overwhelming experience of blissful tears. Destruction of our worldly personality in the presence of a great spirit or at times, having an ecstatic, blissful, spiritual experience or darshan is our Rudra aspect.

The unmanifest rudra is Rudra as the Supreme Being or Brahman. This is realized in *nirbija samadhi*, the final state of samadhi in which there is absorption without seed. When he manifests his supreme power, he is Ishwara, the creator, maintainer and destroyer of the universe.

According to SS Goswami, Rudra also appears in a specific form of divinity: a spiritual, calm and pure form that, when his devotee is spiritually prepared, absorbs all the cosmic principles which bind him to worldliness.

According to the celebrated Sanskrit scholar, Acharya Karunamaya Bhattacharya Saraswati, Rudra is he who causes the disappearance of *rut*, sorrow, or bestows *rut*, knowledge. This knowledge is the knowledge of Brahman, arising in samadhi.

Lakini Darshan

Lakini is a form of Ma Kundalini herself in manipura. Her darshan is essential to fully awaken the powers associated with manipura and for Ma Kundalini to become firmly established within manipura. Devi Lakini's darshan is achieved through ritual and prayer. A powerful technique is to create her form in art and then visualize her in the flames of a ritualistic sacred fire as in a havan ceremony and she will come alive within.

Vision of Lakini is attainable through meditation and concentration upon her, and by her darshan, the vision of Lord Rudra becomes attainable also. A Lakini vision removes all obstacles enabling meditational penetration into the centre of manipura.

Lakini is the shakti of Lord Rudra and without her, he is powerless and insignificant. Goswami likens Rudra, without Lakini, to being a corpse. To be able to awaken Lord Rudra within us, it is essential to have Devi Lakini's darshan.

When the colour of Lakini is black, it indicates she is in tamasic form, *tamas* pertaining to ignorance or darkness. During the experience of Lakini, she absorbs obstacles on the path so we can explore and experience the depth of manipura. Tamasic Lakini's effect is to make the body steady and motionless and allows the sadhaka to become free from all physical, mental and psychic constraints and for a clear path within.

When the colour of Lakini is red, she becomes one with Lord Rudra and the practitioner develops intense concentration; if sattwic, the sadhaka develops divine consciousness.

Lakini has three heads due to her three aspects or *gunas*, namely, *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*. According to Goswami, the *vajra*, thunderbolt, indicates unyielding control, and *shakti* as represented by the spear, is the power to transform all forms of energy into concentration energy.

The mantra forms of Lakini are *Lang* and *Aing*; those of *shakti* are *Eng*, *Ah*, *Ang*, *Ing*, *Ring*, *Iring*, *Aing*, *Kang*, *Khang*, *Tang*, *Sang*, *Kling*, *Hring* and *Hsouh*; and those of the *vajra* are *Mang* and *Lang*.

11

A Unique Experience

There is no right or wrong experience, especially when it comes to spiritual experience. The whole experience reveals something within. It reveals a higher consciousness which was previously concealed, and also reveals your potential. When divine experiences come up, they defy explanation. The Divine is not understandable. Not only are you getting an image you can't talk about, you are getting a kind of expanded consciousness, an understanding, a vision or inner vision, an inner understanding which cannot be described. It can't be conveyed. It's the 'Now I see!' or 'Now I understand!' type of experience. As a result of studying these numerous texts, one develops a deep respect for the ancient masters, both for their depth of knowledge and their ability to encapsulate the total experience from mooladhara to sahasrara in only a few verses.

Goswami reasons in *Laya Yoga* that the different experiences of the chakras and their aspects are due to the different pranas flowing at the time of sadhana. He writes, “*Rang*, with the ten *matrikas* or letters of the Sanskrit alphabet (seen on the petals of manipura), is the *tejas-mahabhuta* in operation . . .” *Rang* is a form of रं, the bija mantra *Ram*, and *tejas mahabhuta* is the element of fire power found in manipura, which is transformed into the bija mantra *Rang* by meditation. Goswami continues, “The pranic forces are also operating along with the *mahabhuta*,

the power of the five elements. Tejas-mahabhuta, the fire power, is seen in deep concentration as a red triangle. When the radiations are withdrawn into the central bija *Rang* by pratyahara or concentration, only the bija remains. The bija is the *rupa-tanmatra* or the subtle principle of colour and form. At this stage, all other forces cease to operate.” This demonstrates that the elements of the petals, the aksharas and their colours, all come from the bija mantra of ॠ (*Ram* or *Rang*).

The individual colours of the aksharas or matrika mantras influence the experience of the sadhaka so that one gets a fascinating play of coloured lights in manipura. Thus it is described as a city of jewels. As we continue to concentrate on the aksharas and the petals, the colours keep changing, and the result is a display of changing lights. The individual pranas combine to enhance the experience in the chakra.

Why persist with practice?

The experiences relayed to us in ancient and contemporary texts by those who have mastered the whole scope of manipura leave us somewhat dissatisfied unless, of course, we read between the lines. The sense of achievement at being able to attain any one of these amazing experiences related in this book is something not expressed. The experiences are related in a most detached way, and the descriptions of the goddess Lakini, for example, with one head or two, with four arms, holding a spear and a mala are not inspirations in themselves, yet they are divine experiences of another realm, a higher dimension. Comprehending this, we can draw the inspiration to settle down and take up this sadhana with the steadfast determination of the stubborn mesha and continue until kundalini has entered manipura and we are established on our spiritual course. Such experiences defy description, just as explaining life on the edge of the ocean and bathing in the ocean to a simple desert dweller would defy description and comprehension.

Beginning of real spiritual insight

We have crossed over swadhisthana; struggled with, and hopefully transcended, many of our karmas, samskaras and desires. In the process, we learned that fulfilling our multitude of desires will never satisfy the demands of *ahamkara*, the ego, ever.

When the consciousness evolves to manipura, we acquire a spiritual perspective that cannot be seen from mooladhara or swadhisthana. From mooladhara and swadhisthana, we have our mental and emotional problems. From manipura, however, we see the bliss, the noble views, the perfect ideas and the greater possibilities of human consciousness. Then, whatever we think and do will be influenced by this higher vision, according to Sri Swamiji.

We begin to enjoy the freedom of no longer being attached to, and controlled by, desires of the lower chakras. We are no longer tied to habits that have held us back. The fog of emotional problems has been lifted; we have been able to rise above.

The ability to be able to imagine and manifest at will is a joy, and the power comes from within; it comes from an awakened manipura. We are free to decide and to act at a higher level, using willpower. With the enhanced power of decision and action, worldly pursuits and spiritual pursuits both will be successful.

This is truly the first spiritual realm, and it represents the beginning of our spiritual journey beyond mental turmoil. Here, we get a view of the great path ahead. The path is in front of us! We can see the way to God. What an inspiration for the seeker!



Devi Lakini

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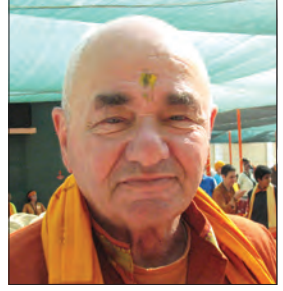
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Rishi Nityabodhananda graduated in Metallurgy from the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, in 1967. He joined the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger, and on Basant Panchami, 1970, he was initiated into poorna sannyasa by Swami Satyananda.

He currently lives in Australia where he conducts yoga seminars and satsangs, and ruminates on the meaning of life and the source of it all. On the 21st February 1999, he was initiated into rishi sannyasa by Swami Niranjanananda.



Working with manipura chakra, the energy centre located behind the navel, is the beginning of developing spiritual values. The powers of manipura are separate from the earthly realm. When manipura awakens, one can rise above habits and is free to decide and act at a higher level, through willpower. Manipura is the crossroads from where personal power and spiritual potential begin to unfold.

In *Manipura Chakra*, Rishi Nityabodhananda discusses the many facets of this chakra, including its place in kundalini yoga, its influence on the personality, its symbology, and practices to awaken and transcend manipura. Written in an easy style full of wit and humour, the book draws from traditional and modern texts on yoga and tantra, and provides a foundational understanding of this essential energy centre in the scheme of human life.

